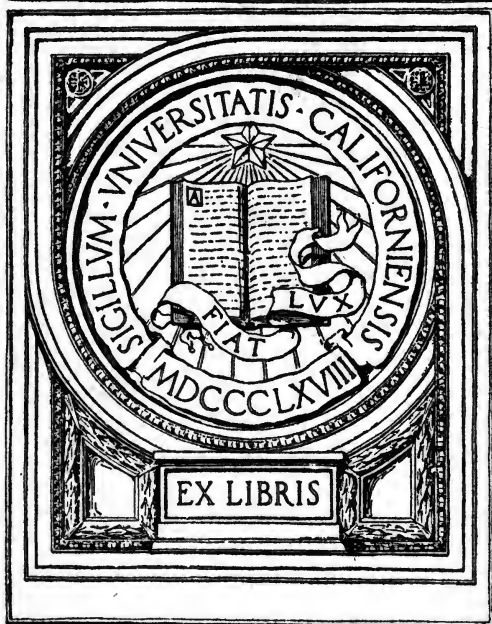


*Honesty's
Garden
Paul Creswick*

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HONESTY'S GARDEN

BY

PAUL CRESWICK

G. P. PUTNAM'S SONS
NEW YORK AND LONDON
The Knickerbocker Press

1910

The Knickerbocker Press, New York

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"Dearest—this book I gave you years ago"

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Honesty's Garden

CHAPTER I

A SPECKLED thrush, puffing his plum chest, called once—twice—from the highest twig on the highest branch of the pear-tree near my window. I heard presently answering notes, slightly petulant, perhaps. The rain had fallen sweetly during the night, turning all the lumpy, hard ground soft and fragrant, and cleansing the rose trees of blight. The close lawn was sparkling under the early sun, as though sprinkled by some lavish magic hand with millions of diamonds.

Already the sun was well above the hills across the valley, flinging slant rays reproachfully towards us. The cuckoo's sly notes sounded from the deep woods beyond the village; he invited folk to awake—to leave their warm nests. The thrush whistled again from his perch per-

emptorily, then dropped swiftly to the grass. There was something amid the diamonds of dew really remarkable!

After a fitting interval came the good lady. She had finished preening her feathers, and now deigned to flutter her sleek round self nearer her fussy lord and master. She eyed the wriggling morsel which he had captured with a fine air of disdain. "Whatever's *that*?" she asked plainly, her head on one side. Then, before he could attempt an explanation, "Pray don't speak with your beak full, dear—it's such a bad example for the chicks. Besides, it does n't suit you!"

She condescended to accept the tit-bit, however, and at once flew off to the nest. Such a twittering now! I could imagine the scene: three or four hungry, tremendous mouths all clamouring together to be served first! Typical little birds obeying prime instincts.

Honesty awoke—who could sleep through such a din? I heard her casement opening wide, and drew back into the dimity shadows of my own curtained window. A gentle puff of fresh pure wind, pungent with aromatic savours, greeted her. "Bless the birds!" I expect she said, smiling to hear the uproar in the thrush's nest; "how very early they do wake up!" Then crossing to her glass, and smothering a

tiny yawn, she concluded (no doubt), "What a fright I look!"

I can only guess at Honesty's words; but I expect she either said or thought just what I have written. I am always careful to open and close my window very gently; a summer's morning is a wonderful business, not to be disturbed by harsh sounds or by unmannerly intrusion. Much of the garden can be seen from my room—all the bushes and taller plants, while the long sweep of close turf peeps between the whispering trees very refreshingly. Soon I see Honesty herself, pink in her cotton dress, bareheaded, with big gloves on her small hands, and with sharp scissors snipping a bouquet.

Honesty is really the spirit of the place. This busy little maid, experienced of twenty whole summers, enters unassumingly, and—presto!—the garden is worth a thousand thousand times its value of a moment before. What quick, deft fingers has she, despite those clumsy gloves! I see a cloud of bright blossoms filling her gathered-up apron, stains of deeper pink against the pale pinkness of her dress, roses shy and sweet crowding each other in lovely disorder.

Is it fair to watch Honesty like this? I think yes—for surely God sent us pretty things that we might look upon them, and so learn how to be beautiful.

"Good-morning, Mr. Swift."

"Oh," say I, disconcerted no little, "I did n't know you could see me."

Honesty laughs, but only briefly glances upward towards my window. "I knew you were there," she answers, smiling half to me, half to herself.

"Did you?" ask I, rather curious; "and how did you know?"

She goes on filling her apron. Presently——

"Did you enjoy your trip to the West?"

"Very much. But please tell me how——"

"Did you buy any new books?"

"Only one or two—not new books though. I had a great find on Tuesday. Please wait until I come down; I must tell you about the find."

A few moments afterwards I am peering above the hedge of sweetbriar which divides our gardens. Honesty has pocketed her scissors, and is making up the bouquet. It develops astonishingly under her clever little fingers.

"Very nice," I announce, approving everything. "Now, give me my answer."

"What did you ask? I don't remember."

"I want to know how you knew I was there."

"There?—in the West? Why, you yourself told me you were going."

"That won't do. I mean—how did you guess I was peeping at you just now?"

"I did n't guess it," replies Honesty provokingly; "I knew it."

"Yes; but how did you know it?"

"Because, because—oh, any one could have known you were about! You make such a noise."

"I opened my window ever so quietly. Even the birds did n't notice me."

"They were too busy with breakfast," she interrupts. "Here's a button-hole for you. And, another time, put on your hat; the mornings are often very chilly. You shall tell me about your new books some other day; mother is calling me now."

"I made such a find," I begin to explain. But Honesty, with an apologetic laughing curtsy, is gone from view ere I can reach my theme.

So there for a few moments I stand, and stare into the cool gloom of the wide hall into which she has vanished. I can faintly distinguish the white face of the steady old clock, the rise of the low stairs.

Bless me, what a delightful place is this old world! Life is a great blessing, a great gift. Summer, and a garden as fair as Eden; a small Eve withal very delightful to look upon, and waiting demurely for the right Adam. A paradise free from serpents, let us hope!

So to a quiet breakfast, and afterwards to

work. With my pipe and my book, I can disregard the newspaper. What care I for frets and worries this morning?

I write busily, and fulfil most of my morning's task ere seeking relaxation. Then, at eleven or thereabout, I take a book, and think again of the garden.

That way madness lies. Once in the sunlight, I know I shall never have strength of mind to return to duty. I elect to read for ten minutes or so, with my back to the alluring open window.

Mine is a very small library, gathered together in many years from many hands. I believe I have loved books since I was able to read. Books are house and home to me, my holidays and workdays; they are my servants and my masters, my children and my friends. These have I acquired by toil, and by chastening self-denials in other directions. Some are of old acquaintance; to those on the top shelf have I only just been introduced. I cannot say if any of them will travel downward to that especial shelf whereon are the well-tried and always faithful—those which I can reach from my arm-chair with ease.

Here a baker's dozen of a series, now long ago concluded rather summarily by its publisher. They are the first ones of it—fiction all of them. They seemed to be sincere—to strike (how many

years ago?) a new note. Anything out of conventional ruts attracts me. I have not much mind which way books trend in thought or purpose, if their writer's purpose be honest. Save us—'t is only by our mistakes that we learn! Some one has said this before me, but it makes no difference to the truth of it.

'A man shall be known by the company he keeps—in his books. Here on my few shelves is my record of eight-and-thirty years, written plainly, page by page. Any one of understanding may know me at a glance.

It is a dreadful thought. I will curtain my shelves, and sell some of my books forthright, all except the Shakespeare, my pride and my joy—eight very fine quartos, originally bound together in one volume. If I might only discover the ninth! But my pipe is done, and upon my desk lie sheets of clean paper ready for spoiling; beside them a stack of novels for review. Unhappy me, and still more unhappy authors of these gaily rigged ventures on a wide sea. If in a passage in any one of these I discover an idea in common with my own small philosophy, I shall straightway deem the writer a shrewd and sensible fellow. His tale shall be told me, and I will listen intelligently to the whole of it. Then shall I, in gratitude, do my best for him.

If, on the other hand, nothing in tune with my selfish, solitary notions appears, then shall I dismiss the poor man speedily, and with cold farewells. His book will go to that worthy gentleman in St. Martin's Lane, who shall give me a sixth (or less) of the published price—provided the work reaches him within a month of publication, and is practically uncut! What a farce it is; yet I do suppose that critics all work in my way, so that my reviews are as valuable, or valueless, as theirs.

There is consolation in the idea that reviews do not matter much. No review ever made a book yet, or ever will. It may help: just as Honesty, by tending her little garden, and by bringing intelligent love to bear on her roses, helps them to full measure of success. But the real reason of her garden is not altogether Honesty. An intangible element is in the being of some of her bushes. These fellows keep free from blight, do not get mildew even in the driest season, blossom from June to September without apparent effort. They are a bewildering success, in spite of culture and care and feeding—if one might dare think it. As like as not Honesty, with that sharp little knife of hers, cut them back cruelly in the spring, disregarded them, and lavished her skill on other trees struggling ineptly.

It's a gift, born with people—perhaps cultivated by them, all unknowingly. Success is not luck, it does *not* come as a reward; it is simply *in* some of us, just as music is, or art, or business.

Therefore reviews do not matter—at least, not my reviews.

An article for the *Daily Rocket* is a more serious task, and one which I must complete ere nightfall. It will take me three hours, and then I shall not produce a paper which I shall really like. Also, there is a beastly book on *Alfred* which I must finish by the end of July; this should have attention to-day.

Now I don't much care about Alfred. When, on reading him up, you find he did *not* recite the Psalms by heart long before he was able to walk, that he never was in the cottar's hut burning cakes, you feel that, to a large extent, he is an impostor. On looking further, you discover that positively he usurped the throne, the actual next-of-kin to poor unsung Ethelred being Ethelred's own child—Alfred's toddling nephew. Of course the little chap could not have been a king right away. But did Alfred make any movement in the right direction when Ethelred junior came to years of discretion?

I pause for a reply.

However, when a man has attained a mille-

nary, one has to write about him, whatever one's private feeling may be.

I want one day to write a book which shall really be my own. It won't have much story in it, and shall not be forced. I will build it in my own way, just as I feel inclined.

It will be a capital means of ridding myself of pestilent ideas and enthusiasms. Evils, or what I believe to be evils, shall be denounced in the grand style upon its sacred pages. Instead of going about airing views, which, Heaven knows, may be as ridiculously wrong as most views are (for what mortal eye can see all round a thing?), I shall simply rant and rave my way to peace again within my book's unheeding covers. My admirations, my follies, my tolerations, my religions, my self, shall be permitted only in this garden.

What a collection of . . . weeds it will be!

CHAPTER II

THE first scene of the first act of a comedy is performed before my window—or, rather, Honesty's window—each day. The curtain rings up at eight-thirty A.M. without fail; on fine mornings it is often earlier.

From my point of view only half of the persons of the play may be observed. I must explain that Honesty's garden and mine are side by side, each facing into the highroad at their eastern boundaries. At breakfast I sit with my back to the window, as I do not like folk who sit the other way, for ever peering out at other people's business.

But I have a mirror above a rather nice old sideboard (in the Adam style, and very useful), and in that magic circle I perceive this first scene of a comedy which never gets beyond the first scene. It all comes to one point over and over again—not by any means to a climax, yet it never fails to be interesting. I can picture to myself how Honesty smiles in response to the young fellow's half-shy greeting!

What do those two dear young things imagine, I wonder, in June? Singing birds, sunshine, perfume of roses and old-fashioned flowers—health and happiness——

Ideals too. Near to the eyes is the soul when one is young! To leave the world a wee bit better for your having lived in it, to be kind, to help—these are the royal prerogatives! And these the success I will wring from life.

So go the years, each one showing our ideals as increasingly difficult, almost impossible—more and more shadowy and vague.

All we like sheep——

But let me credit Mr. Baillie with conviction at least in the present stage of it. He is twenty-three, well set up, a good lad. Truly he worships Honesty, and passes her garden morning by morning in ever-increasing adoration. If she should be there, with that great apron about her and those important gloves on her small hands——

“We’ll be having some rain,” he will venture.

“Oh, please don’t say that! It rained all last night, and I want the sun to shine every minute of to-day. I have so much to do.”

“It’s always busy you are, Miss Honesty.”

“Indeed, yes. I hardly know where to begin.

The weeds grow so fast, and the grass always wants mowing. I think you might stay and help me."

Poor Baillie! Just then he hears the faint whistle down the valley which tells that his train is passing the far signals. He'll have to trot for it, for this little duologue has taken longer to say than to write. The lad's so nervous that it's a relief to him to run off, with some chokingly explanatory "good-bye." He is never so "Scotch" with me. Indeed, it is only at a crisis of this nature that you might know Baillie for a "laddie" at all.

I wish I could see Honesty's face during this passage-of-arms—nearly an entire scene in our Comedy of Love. But the sweetbriar hedge is only partially reflected in my mirror, and I own I have guessed the dialogue mainly.

It is interesting to hear the news of Carbridge-on-the-Mole, the happenings whilst I have been away. We have really tremendous epochs down here in this pretty Surrey village—on occasion. You shall hear.

I summon Jones—my housekeeper, gardener, general servant, cook, still-room and tweeny maid, butler, and (within limits) *valet-de-chambre*. She instructs me as to the more recent history of our times.

First, I tell her:

"You can take away breakfast when you like, Jones."

"Thank you, sir. The boy did n't bring the paper this morning."

"So I see. You must tell me the news—if you have any." (Spoken indifferently in tone; I have to be wary with Jones.)

"Nothing much, sir. Miss Legard was married on Tuesday."

"Oh! Nice affair?"

"Yes, sir—very nice. The young lady wore white satin, made princess—with a trailing skirt: quite swept the aisle it did. Orange blossoms in her hair, and four bridesmaids. Such a lot of people in the church, sir—just like Sunday evening; and they had a full choir, and a red carpet all down the road."

"All down the road, Jones?"

"Yes, sir; it was nice. Red felt at ten-three a yard out of Hoy's shop, just like my brother's wife has on her stairs. And the organ was playing lovely——"

Jones pauses, irresolute. "I thought you would n't mind, sir, so I just locked up the house for an hour. Everything was perfectly safe, and I came straight back. I'm sure I hope you're not——"

"Well, Jones, I know you would n't do anything risky." I don't half like it, all the same,

but, between ourselves, I'm a trifle afraid of Jones, she's an old servant. Suppose some one had broken in, though; I'm positive they would have taken my *Compleat Angler*, a fine copy—or my Rowlandson prints. Or possibly the set of Lowestoft mugs—frightful thought. The Shakespeare would not tempt every one, because so few people know of it.

I must somehow let Jones understand that this mustn't be taken as a precedent. "Of course, er—um." (Pause.) "I don't much care for the house to be left, in the ordinary run of things."

"Quite so, sir. But we don't have many weddings down here, sir, more's the pity."

(Why does Jones eye me so severely? It's no fault of mine.)

"Well, did the bride cry, or do anything else usual and exciting?"

"No, sir, Miss Legard didn't cry—not as I saw. She seemed rather glad and 'smiley,' sir. They been engaged ten years, sir."

The tone in which Jones used the word is a revelation, and stamps her at once above her kind. Walking-out is the expression any other Jones would have used, but not my Jones.

"Smiley, was she? Let us hope she will be as happy as she hopes." (Jones is eyeing me

again. I hasten to change my note.) "The church was crowded, eh?"

"Yes, sir. I never see so many new dresses, and there were twenty Maid Marians throwing roses all under their feet as they walked——"

"Hold hard, Jones. Twenty Maid Marians?"

Jones is firm. "*And* twenty little Robin Hoods. They was on the other side of the carpet, throwing more roses. The Sunday-school children, sir—Miss Legard's own class. There was breakfast afterwards in Mr. Legard's meadow. You could see it all from my window."

"You had come back by then?"

"Oh, yes, sir. I was n't gone more than an hour. I did n't mean to leave your books and things so long, only the time did slip by. I took the liberty of dusting the shelves, sir."

"So I noticed—very carefully done, too. I'm obliged to you." Clever girl, Jones, can dust a bookshelf without thoroughly disarranging it; does n't tidily put back volumes I have specially taken out for easy reference. "Any other news?"

"The young lady next door went in pink—very pretty summer sort of dress, sir, but hardly right for a wedding, was it? Such a short skirt too, quite clear of the ground all round. And a great straw hat with roses in it—and no bou-

quet; only just flowers cut from her own garding, sir."

A vision of Honesty rises before me. I'll readily wager she looked the best there.

"Rather odd for a wedding, sir?" Jones persists.

"Oh, I don't know. Simplicity is Miss Dene's note. Have n't you noticed the sweetbriar hedge round her garden?"

"Yes, sir; of course, sir." Jones is puzzled.

"Sweetbriar stands for simplicity, as you should know—being a country girl. Just see if my paper has come, will you? I fancy I heard the boy just now."

So Jones departs, evidently unconvinced. She, despite her years, would have gone to the wedding, had she been a guest, in a dress of all colours of the rainbow, be-frilled and be-flounced, yards long, and brand new from Hoy himself. (Hoy is the local universal provider.) Special appearances and manners for special occasions—how artificial and wicked!

But that's precisely how the world wags.

.

I am so tired of the modern newspaper; I want something much more human—something where common-sense and sympathy find places. Our present-day newspaper occupies its assertive self so much with the worse side of our coats

—the rents and rags: so little is said of the stuff itself—of the fine-drawn repairs.

If our clothes fit ill or wear badly—there's the newspaper man, with a loud voice, more than ready to draw every one's attention to the fact. I don't want to read of miserable things—really miserable, I mean; of the quarrels of my neighbours, and the worse quarrels of nations. The newspaper too often makes the quarrel—helps it to develop. Besides, why give evil such advertisement? Alas, for the deep-rooted depravity of us all. The newspaper man answers by slapping his pocket. Cut all the evil out of a newspaper, and where would be the profits of a "daily" anything?

But I preach, which is a bad symptom; moreover, there are excellent good points in a newspaper. It advertises all the new books; tells me (in its own fashion—I read between the lines) all about them. It also runs a library.

I hear further as to the wedding—from Honesty herself. She tells me it was beautiful, and that the weather was perfect. That the bride was sweet, and said her responses so that all could hear. That the groom was radiantly nervous, and nearly tripped over the edge of the red felt at ten-three a yard.

"I trust you did n't laugh."

"I?" Honesty is surprised at the question.
"No, I did n't laugh. I—I cried."

"Cried?"

"Not then, of course. It was before—in the church. It all seemed so solemn, so dreadful—in a way. But you will think that silly."

I shake my head; I imagine that I understand. We are holding this conversation through my open parlour window. She has brought me some rose-leaves showing signs of mildew. I am to pronounce a cure for the trouble. "Powdered sulphur," I am beginning; "but you must be very——"

"It means so much to a girl," she says, inconsequently.

"And to the man," I declare, cleverly seeing that her thoughts are still with the wedding. "It's a fearful lottery for a man."

"Oh, well—I don't know." She hesitates. "Don't you see," she goes on—stumblingly for Honesty, "a woman is just what a man makes her, is n't she? I mean if he's good, and kind, and——"

She stops short; she cannot travel openly with her argument—she is doubtful.

"It cuts both ways—like your pruning-knife," I state judicially. I can look down upon her from our window, and this gives me an air. "A good wife makes a good husband, and *vice*

versa. The true basis on which to build up a happy married life is Give-and-take—and Don't-expect-too-much."

"Give-and-take?" questions Honesty, blankly.

"That, and patience. There's foundation and superstructure for you."

"Nothing else?"

"Let me think. Of course there's Unselfishness, and Ability to Manage. There's Proper Pride; and Don't-try-to-commence-where-your-parents-left-off. That's very important."

"There's—there's Love," she interrupts, suddenly and boldly; then turns as red as the red roses in her garden.

Dear me, Mr. Baillie! You have made my Honesty dream all that stuff and nonsense, eh?

Her blue eyes meet mine valiantly. She lifts her small, determined round chin, confirming the challenge.

"Not that it matters to me, you know." Honesty is smiling, having entirely routed the enemy. Romance holds the field. "I'm going to be an old maid."

"That's awfully unoriginal of you, then," I interpose, displeased. "So many girls have become old maids since the world began."

"Poor things!"

"Not at all. Their own fault, no doubt.

Either too much modesty, or too open with their—love, or whatever you call the complaint.”

“I’m afraid you’re going to be horrid,” remarks Honesty, peeping up at me. “Wasn’t the last book a first edition, after all! *Not* in the original boards; and was it ten years too late?”

“It was a bargain at any rate,” I retort; “even if I did make a mistake! And—observe—see how it bears on the question. If I—experienced bibliophile as I am—can make a mistake about a book after all these years, how much more easily could I make a mistake about a woman, a book no one ever properly understood, so far.”

“But we were talking about Marie, I thought. It was her wedding, you know. Why bring yourself into it? Are you contemplating——”

“Heaven forbid!” I cry, vigorously. “But you—that’s a different matter. If you really wish to become an old maid, you shall have Keedels. There’s a cat, if you like!”

“Oh, and she belongs to Jones!” Honesty is profoundly shocked at my suggested violation of the sacred laws of property. She adds, with truth, “Jones would leave you at once if you were to lose Keedels.”

“I should simply get a new housekeeper,”

I announce, calmly. I add, stupidly, "Perhaps you would come?"

She starts, flushes—lifts a quick, troubled glance to mine. I see that I have offended her. Idiotic of me, trying to be funny. I'm not funny; and I ought to be aware of the fact. It's a relief to hear Jones behind me murmuring something about the butcher. I don't catch what she says, but I welcome the butcher passionately. "I'll bring some sulphur," I call to Honesty, "during the day. It's gardener's work; you must let me show you."

She has already gone; and with inward misgivings I turn to hear Jones. Her theme is butchers; their impudence and unreliability.

CHAPTER III

I HAVE been flustered with visitors. The 'Aunt Sophie squadron has successfully stormed the fastnesses of the Haven at Carbridge-on-the-Mole. Behold my home invaded by an exceedingly capable aunt and two rather nice motoring girls.

Not a large contingent, but deadly, nevertheless. Aunt Sophie brings Eva—her eldest daughter, and Eva brings Kitty—her sworn companion in crime. They have brought their new motor—or, rather, it has (indifferently well) brought them! A weedy-looking youth (the gardener's son, I imagine), who has driven them here, has already been flat on the road underneath the motor, on top of my only macintosh. The attitude is, I am instructed, usual and necessary.

The village gathered to witness the entertainment, but a series of loud and totally unexpected "pops" from the front part of the infernal machine caused the juvenile portion of our inhabitants to withdraw hastily. The gardener's son alone was calm; he said one word.

I hastily called my guests indoors, offering to regale them with such refreshment as Jones and I could find at short notice.

It appeared that Eva, who looked the picture of health, was positively dying to see me. Thus Aunt Sophie, who was quite in form: "It's ages since we have seen you, that's the truth, Mortimer. What have you been doing all this time?"

"Existing, dear aunt, simply existing."

"What else can one do in the country? You are quite a savage, Mortimer; but I like you still. So Jones has n't left? I suppose you have to humour her a great deal?"

Fatal topic! I steer carefully. "We humour each other, dear aunt. Do you think that lad is quite safe? What extraordinary sounds the car is making. Your boy seems to be winding it up now."

"Starting the engines," remarks Eva informally, just glancing towards the window. "It's such a dear thing, Cousin Mortimer. Fancy!—we came through from Knightsbridge in forty minutes!"

"Thirty-nine," corrects Kitty, whose other name I find presently to be Harrison.

Aunt Sophie has taken in the details of my parlour. "What charming old-fashioned furniture. How nice and beeswaxy it smells. And

that funny little mirror, too—so artistic. I suppose those tea-cups there are something very precious?”

“You would like tea, aunt? I ought to have thought of it long ago.”

“I believe your Jones is bringing it, Cousin Mortimer,” announces Eva, hopefully. “May we, in the meantime, have a peep at the Haven? We won’t disturb anything, and Kitty and I do so long to see a real bachelor house. May we?”

“Of course,” I say; “make yourselves at home, please.”

“You will excuse us, Mortimer?” My aunt rises to play chaperone, I suppose.

“Willingly.”

“Oh, isn’t he in a hurry to get rid of us!” cries Eva, taking me up. “Do come along Kit, or the monster will say something worse. Look! he’s opening his mouth already!”

“Not to eat you, my dear, but merely to remark that, if I seem a very grizzly bear, it’s all your fault. You should give bears sugar when you want them to appear at their best.”

I put my hands behind my back, and bend my head a little forward, expectantly. Eva hesitates—permits the others to go out before her; her small mouth half puckers itself, very tantalisingly; then she alters her mind, “Shall I, Kit?”

Miss Harrison calls from the stairs, "I think we had better have sugar, Eva—just to sweeten our tea."

Eva tip-toes up to me, and I catch her in my arms. Really, it's an experience. I haven't enjoyed anything so much for years. My cousin expostulates, squeaks—and escapes.

"You're a naughty, naughty bear! I'm astonished—pained—utterly and for ever shocked—I'll tell Kit the minute I get upstairs." She pauses at a sudden inspiration. "No, I won't; I'll—tell the girl next door—you see if I don't."

She flies for her life, while I remain properly confounded. Eva tell Honesty that I kissed her! Whatever for? Tell Honesty! She would simply say, "Why not, pray? Isn't he your cousin?"

I chuckle over this ridiculous incident, and wonder why Eva should have said such a thing. What does she—little gad-about on motor-cars—know of "girls next door"? Who told her there *was* a girl next door? Honesty would be amused. I, old enough to be her father—absurd.

Later, the girls are allowed to turn over my books and generally rummage round. Aunt Sophie takes me for a walk in the garden, whilst the weedy-looking youth, having wound and unwound the engines to his heart's content and the

perplexity of the machine, takes tea with Jones. The motor-car remains sulkily silent, but every instant I expect to hear it go off. It has a forbidding appearance; its lightless lamps are two eyes fixing me with cold glances of disapproval.

Aunt Sophie makes known the main object of this visit. (I knew Eva was n't dying!) I am warned and advised. Warned first—that being the most important—to draw out my small holding in Gatherway's publishing business. Gatherway is alleged to be embarrassed. "He'll go, Mortimer, you mark my words. Your uncle Duveen told me on the quiet, 'Pop down to Carbridge and warn the boy.' That's what your uncle said this very morning. So down we came."

I thank Aunt Sophie, without having the smallest intention of hurting Gatherway's feelings in any way. Bless me, we went up to Oxford together—in the same college! He took his degree first, then, after a little preliminary dabbling in literature, applied himself to business. He has a name in the publishing world of Edinburgh—a good name—and he pays five per cent. I should n't dream of disturbing his faith in me—or of losing five per cent.

Secondly, advice gratis. I am nearing forty, it appears, and it is high time I settled down. One way and another—according to Aunt

Sophie—I have an income of eight hundred a year.

“May I beg of you not to breathe it to the income-tax assessors?” I plead; “they only put it down at——”

“Don’t be nonsensical, Mortimer. A nice girl, properly trained, might contrive——”

“They do contrive, aunt, without any training. We had a wedding here only last week.”

“Be quiet, and attend. This is for your own good, Mortimer. Now you know what sort of creature will best suit you. Personally, I declare diamonds trumps.”

“Content, dear aunt.”

“Diamonds, then; and mind you play your hand properly. It will be your turn to declare later on, and I should strongly advise you to call hearts. How would you like Kitty Harrison for a partner?”

“Oh, aunt—this is so sudden!”

“She’s a pretty girl, a healthy girl, and a lady. Twenty-six, no affectation, a fine constitution, and *comfortable*.” Aunt Sophie’s tone gave it the correct manner. I found myself expecting a conclusion on these lines: “Now gentlemen, what do you say? Here’s a bargain—a chance in a thousand. A young woman absolutely unspoiled by the world; twenty-six, healthy, nice-looking. A fine constitution—

twenty-six! thank you, sir!—twenty-six; going at twenty-six!——”

“It's not dear,” I admit.

“She is a dear,” emphasises Aunt Sophie, mistaking my long pause for acquiescence in her schemes. “The more you see of her, Mortimer, the more you'll like her. Besides, time does n't stand still for us, even if we do collect china and old books. What's the use of your gathering together this pretty little houseful of treasures, if there's no one to leave it to? Think of your books being sold to rascally dealers—or, worse still—to other collectors!” (Aunt has me here. I wince palpably, and she follows up her advantage.) “Think of your china—the Lowestoft, the square-mark Worcester, the Nantgarw tea service—broken up amongst your distant relatives. Get a wife, Mortimer; some one to share your joys, and halve——”

“My income,” I wail, feebly. “Perhaps she won't like china; perhaps she'll have idols of her own.”

“They'll belong to both of you,” declares my aunt; and for a moment I don't follow the bearing of this remark. “It will be the making of you, Mortimer. I shall come and see you again soon, and if I *can* bring Kitty——”

Fortunately, Miss Harrison and Eva just then came out of the house. Eva is breathless with

admiration. "Oh, cousin, we do think your books wonderful. We have only turned out a dozen shelves" (Heavens!) "and there are heaps more. Poetry, too, and Kit does so love poetry."

"Come as often as—your motor-car will let you," say I, recovering slowly from the fright into which Aunt Sophie had put me. "I'll show you the lions of Carbridge—our greatest attractions."

"That will be only going so far as the next garden, cousin, won't it?" asked Eva, slyly. What a little wretch!

When saying good-bye, Miss Harrison gives me, briefly, a small, cool, soft hand, a gracious smile, and charming thanks for my poor entertainment of her. Really, quite an amiable girl this, with good teeth and pleasant eyes; walks rather well, too, and does n't talk too much.

It's hardly likely such a paragon would fall in love with a round-shouldered old bibliomaniac. I have heard though, even at Carbridge, that prices just now are ruling high—for bachelors. Too many spinsters (so they say) spoil the market. But I only hanker after bargains—in books!

It would be mean to take advantage of the other poor things; and, by the law of averages, I am inwardly convinced that they make up for

all previous humiliations—once they secure a man. “Pleased to see the world go by in all its changing imagery.” That’s the motto lettered laboriously by me above the lintel of my den. *She* (any she) would soon paint it out!

Just as the motor-car is panting forward, Aunt Sophie remarks: “I hear you have been West again. Did you call at Harry’s place, as I told you?” (Harry is Eva’s brother, who is prospering exceedingly at some weird occupation connected with shoes in a village near Bath.) I shout, “Yes!” and Aunt Sophie Duveen smiles approvingly as, with a jerk, the weedy-looking youth suddenly causes the infernal machine to bound onward and away.

CHAPTER IV

I HAVE sustained a fall in pride: Gatherway has returned my *Alfred* typescript, with a note that it won't do at all. It's too informing, he states, and boys will not be preached at. The youthful mind likes it all story; keep the history "underneath the jam," writes Gatherway.

Thus I have to resume a task which I had deemed complete—in July, too! when the garden is calling me every minute. The weeds are growing faster than the flowers—bother them!—and the grass seems to need mowing as often as I need shaving. The carnations are all crying to be tied up; the sweet-peas are blooming themselves to an early death; and the ground should be continually stirred to keep it sweet. (I'm not a believer in watering. Stir and stir—that's the secret; don't let the earth get crusty—like any old bachelor!)

As for the roses—well, I give it up. Honesty is the only one who can grow roses to any sort of perfection. I can't imagine how she does it. Her garden is next to mine, as you know; it's

the same identical soil, the same aspect. I work much harder than she does, too. I coax them, and syringe them, and disbud freely——

But I can't grow roses to nearly equal Honesty's. The impudence of her roses, the arrogance of them. Great flowers erect on thick stalks; foliage growth that is positively tropical. Her roses—whether standards, half-standards, or bushes—are all healthily alike; teas, noisettes, hybrid-perpetuals—they all flourish.

"It's continual attention," says Honesty, whenever I request her to confess the secret of this natural magic. "It's always watching over them and loving them."

"And understanding the rascals," I cry, "which is more than I do."

"If you love anything, you soon begin to understand it," she tells me. "Don't you understand books?"

Of course, there's something in that. . . . I have very few books to review, it being the betwixt-and-between season. In October I shall groan under stacks of novels, and have to cut them furiously to get through in time for press. Why are we such creatures of superstition? Who told the first publisher that books have no summer nor any winter?

No true author could have given the hint, I'm sure; nor reader (at a guinea per MS.);

nor printer; nor compositor; nor purveyor of hand-made antique paper, "deckle-edged and bulking grandly."

Have the holidays anything to do with it; the fish under the white weirs, the grouse on the moors, the roast turkeys, Christmas puddings, and old port of winter?

It comes to me as a revelation. It is these things which combine to make publishers work for two seasons only in a year. Publishers, like all other people (except authors) are becoming too prosperous. They are being found out—my newspaper says so! They ride in carriages, and they consort with lawyers, brewers, and American millionaires.

Sublime altitude! Shall I ever soar to it? I fear yes—in a degree. Aunt Sophie seems to have been in the know, after all, for I cannot get any dividend out of Gatherway this half-year. I gently reminded him, and then back came my Alfred book. I politely requested a better answer, with no success; and now, in my dreams, county courts with all their attendant horrors seem to be beckoning.

Whether Gatherway will permit himself also to be beckoned remains to be seen. My only consolation is that I did n't marry him to Miss Harrison. That might have happened; for I did ask him to dinner, when, according to threat,

Aunt Sophie brought her charge to bear upon me. But Gatherway would not come out of Scotland—not even for a dinner!

My outer fortifications were gone as soon as Kitty Harrison, this “comfortable” young woman, entered my house with Aunt Sophie and Eva. I liked the little tricks of her: her intense self-possession; the fact that she did n’t glance sideways into looking-glasses as she passed them. I had pleasure in noting the fact that she had good shoulders, and held them squarely. She also was kind enough to appear interested in my books. She has read well and intelligently; moreover, she shares my antipathies. She does not like . . . nor —, nor any others of the “Get Fame Cheap” school.

But somehow I had memory of Honesty in me, and so was serious, and ashamed in a manner. I do not believe for an instant that Miss Harrison has any suspicion of my aunt’s outrageous “intentions.” I did not attempt to be other than a reasonable creature, and so played host to my dangerous guests happily and enjoyingly, without being so entirely concerned with ME, as you might have expected.

I am not able to guess how the Comedy of Love progresses. We may be still in the first act, or at the beginning of the second. Baillie is prudent beyond belief, or else is n’t in love

at all. These young men are very variable. Honesty, being a woman, holds her cards so that she only shall read her hand. Strange how an intense passion for mystery and intrigue appears in all women. It is as deep-planted, as ineradicable, as horse-radish in its own particular field—or as egotism in the male.

I detest your grumbler, but really I have felt queerish of late. Whether it be through general run-downness, or because of Gatherway's affair, I cannot say. If he were to fail—well, it would mean Retrenchment and Reform with capitals! I have only the little I earn as “literary” man (one had better by far be a crossing-sweeper) and a small income arising from my investments. Most of these remain still to the credit of the *Colosseum*—that ancient, virtuous, and Spartan review of which England is so justly proud.

My father was one of the promoters of the *Colosseum* in the early forties. He was a good friend to it, and, in its way, the thing has been grateful. Safe as the bank and as severely imposing, is the *Colosseum*! It has slated Dickens in its time; has ragged Shakespeare, and it enjoys the distinction of having *never* “discovered” any author or artist, nor encouraged anybody. When one has written twelve books (it may now be fifteen), or has exhibited twenty

pictures, the *Colosseum* condescends to "hear" of one. The blushing author or artist is at length noticed by the *Colosseum* prudently and briefly. Then his fortune either is made—or it is n't!

The greatest of all the great Conservative reviews has, however, chronicled his name and his work for all time.

I should not rail at the *Colosseum*, seeing that it virtually keeps me. But this waywardness shows that I am not well. I will go to North Devon forthright—to Lynmouth—where one finds health and happiness at all seasons, more especially, perhaps, in July. Devon in the "full o' summer," when trees are in their sweetest foliage, and the trout are jumping greedily to be caught. The long warm days, and the cool quiet nights; the birds singing for lovers' hearing their love-songs yet; the ferns all unrolled; the rhododendrons blazing to the last under the sighing woods—these are the essentials in that Elixir of Life which gives me youth and faith once again.

The rush of that little tempestuous river, so downright, so determined, so heedless of obstacles! Nine miles fighting past great boulders, leaping them here and there; nine miles deep down betwixt frowning hills, whirling over broad shallows—a silver thread in the ravine, but bound to spin its length to the sea! Here's

a lesson for me—but I am too tired to profit by it. Hope deferred——

Baillie has spent evenings with me, ostensibly to talk about fishing. He is an enthusiast, but has much to learn. Coarse fishing he can, with indifferent success, contrive, but when it comes to the literature of fishing I find him sadly needing assistance.

So he comes to me to imbibe the ethics of pisciculture, with a little—"up to the pretty, please." A fine mature blend, I must tell you, which after years of patient search I have discovered.

It is brought me in a gallon jar, which in its turn is poured gently into a slightly larger little cask—that has a tap not *too* far down. The cask is never to be tilted so that it shall be positively emptied; but one must be adding (on occasion), to keep the tide flowing.

Writing of "Pretty" reminds me of Honesty, of whom I really intended to speak when the whiskey and Baillie interposed. It is even as I thought; he loves the maidie . . . it is not my brilliant lecturing that he comes to hear, nor is it my whiskey which tempts him; although I do assure you it is full fifteen years of age and wondrous mellow. John Baillie permits himself to be bored in order that he may talk with me about Honesty. He has recognised (lover's in-

stinct!) that I am one to whom the subject is not totally without interest.

I have extracted facts which lead me to suspect that we are in the thick of the second act of our comedy. He has, by some means, made known his adoration; and has been——

Rebuked is the word I want: but Baillie shakes his head. Mistress Honesty did not rebuke; she just said nothing at all. At least, only that she was too old for such nonsense; and that he was too young for it. So he brings it to me, and we talk in this wise:

Venator: Trust me, Master, I see now it is a harder matter to catch a trout than a chub; for I have put on the garb of patience and have followed you these two hours.

Piscator: Well, Scholar John, you must endure worse things at the hand of a woman—or you will never make a good lover. What, does she flout you? Then affect to disregard her; let her not see your affection, but make it seem so that it shows like indifference.

Venator: That were a task, Master Swift: for truly I do very passionately worship this maid. She hath eyes of forget-me-not; hair that is bound about my heart.

Piscator: Sir, I will tell you that fires which blaze so fiercely soon burn down. Put restraint upon your actions; and upon your tongue above

all. Come Scholar, leave Honesty alone; do not offer to spoil your chance with her.

Venator: Well now, Master, will you not give me better direction, as a friend, how I may fish for this trout?

Piscator: I can give no better advice; let her be, and she will run after you in turn. Maids that are wilful are usually caught in this fashion—and it is told that they do like and expect to be caught—in the end of it. Look you, there are many sorts of maids, and you must play them carefully. A minnow will not tempt all of them, as true anglers know right well; nor are minnows always to be got. But if you be a true lover, it is sure that you shall find a way to win for yourself, and no other shall teach you.

Venator: Master, I fear I have not the courage to do that which you say. Moreover, it is certain that I must pass by her garden every day when she is in it.

I find, for some obscure reason—because I am not well, I expect—a mean satisfaction in the knowledge that Honesty has discouraged Master John. She is too good for him. Not but what he is a decent lad for some other Jill. Honesty belongs to her garden; and both, in a sense, belong to me. It is right that I should be consulted; I loom paternally above the sweetbriar

horizon for Honesty, no doubt. Does she not insist upon my wearing a hat on chilly mornings? Baillie *may* follow my excellent counsel, after all. And then—Honesty's garden without Honesty. Which, as you already have perceived, is not at all the same thing!

CHAPTER V

BAILLIE recounts how he has come to love Honesty and spares me no detail. He produces evidence against the defendant in the course of his confidences; for he is attempting to carry out the plan of campaign which I have indicated.

Honesty is aware of his perturbed condition; has been aware of it from the outset. In that she did not at once nip him in the bud (as she would have nipped any too presuming plant in her garden), it must be conceded that she has deliberately "led him on."

This is a delightful mode of argument, which I recommend to all folk afflicted like poor John. You can, in this manner, always make good your case. Baillie, finding me so intelligent, is prompted to continue:

"Item: Honesty has asked him to post letters for her on his way to town, and once accepted a stamp.

"Item: She has given him flowers from her garden; not many, but still——

"Item: She inveigled him, at the last charity

bazaar, into purchasing an entirely unnecessary and hideous 'table centre,' and a volume of poetry.

"Item: One of the flowers once given to him was a red rose, which of course meant——"

But the instances could be multiplied *ad nauseam*. The most flagrant is that one of the bazaar. Why a table centre and poetry, if she intended nothing?

We both pause for a reply—while Jones comes into my den with a fresh siphon. "There ain't any more in the house," she remarks, with a peculiarly Jonesian glance towards my disconsolate hero. "I never known you drink a dozen a week before, sir," she adds.

Before we can either of us frame a fitting repartee, Jones continues firmly, "Shall I lock up, sir?"

I'll do it myself, I tell her, apologetically; and she is not to sit up. "I put your letters on your desk, sir," she reminds me, as Baillie drops back into his armchair. I push the tobacco towards him. He fills his pipe, and as I nod hospitably at the decanter, he takes the hint—with a prodigious sigh.

Silence falls, until presently two great illuminating truths break from my companion. He has been regarding me steadfastly, and says, with deliberate emphasis, "I'm thinking, Swift—I'm

thinking ye're no a Scotsman." He watches unblinkingly the effect of his thunderbolt. "There's too much o' comfort in the ways of you, too much seempathy." He puffs a blue cloud of smoke; then concludes, "and the lassie, she's no a Scotsman."

"That's true for you, Jock!" I cry.

He is vexed, however, at this slip, and essays to hide his confusion in the depths of his tumbler. I fancy I see his meaning: Honesty and I are both too foolishly kind to have been born north of the Tweed. In our dread of hurting people's feelings we become dangerously near to being insincere.

"Aweel," observes Baillie, rising, "I'll leave my secret with you, Swift. It is yours to treat as you will. On Saturday I shall be at Glasgow." He sighed once more under the cares of a world of woe.

"You'll write me a word of the lassie now and then?"

"Rely upon it," said I, positively.

He goes, and I smoke on after he has gone—thinking, thinking. I am sentimental to a degree; and find, surprisedly, that I have a headache long ere twelve has struck. I am, in truth, puzzling over the signs and portents of our comedy. Honesty has been to seek, of late; she has never been in her garden when I have walked

in mine. One might say that she has avoided me; but that would be absurd.

Jones has not gone to bed. She taps at the door, and enters—feigning astonishment to discover me still about. She fusses over the siphons and the empty glasses. “It’s beginning to rain, sir,” she volunteers.

“Yes, Mr. John had to take an umbrella.”

“It won’t be more than a shower, I think,” Jones goes on. Her back is purposely turned to me. “It’ll do the country a lot of good. They say rain’s wanted bad in the country.”

“This country’s always wanting something badly,” I say.

“The young lady next door will be glad to see the rain,” remarks Jones, still fussing. “She’s quite given over watering her gardening. Perhaps you noticed the place don’t look half so nice this last day or two?”

I try to think whether I have noticed any change for the worse in Honesty’s garden. Meanwhile Jones is still talking.

“People can’t bother about gardings though, when they’ve got other troubles.”

“Other troubles?” I become vaguely aware that Jones is leading up to a climax.

“Yes, sir, they do say Mrs. Dene has lost all her money through some lawyer. Haven’t you heard about it?”

"You should n't listen to silly tales, Jones," I tell her, not believing the story for an instant. "*They* say, indeed! Folk who tittle-tattle make most of the mischief in this world. I'm surprised you should encourage idle gossip."

Jones turns about. Her face is rather red. I hope she has n't developed, under Baillie's (and my) bad example, a taste for the contents of my little cask. Really, her voice is rather shaky——

"I knew you did n't know," she is saying. "She is so proud, that one. Yes, sir, it's quite true; I've cried my eyes out about them having to leave—such a kind, gentle young lady—she's not made for a hard life; it will break her heart to have to give it all up——"

"Give it all up?" says I, vexed with Jones. "I'm sure *I* give it up. Whatever are you talking about? There, never mind to explain—I daresay I can guess. You had better get along to bed."

She goes floundering out of the room. I should n't like to swear she was n't crying. Maudlin—oh, horrible!

I smoke on to regain my peace of mind. My Jones a—— No, I can't believe it. Any other Jones, but not my Jones. She has been teetotal from birth; I could swear it. I must put temptation out of her way.

Remembering my letters, not looked at since Baillie arrived prior to the post, I rise and cross to my desk. Book lists, advertising works at a very fair sum over and above their market value; an appeal from a Right Honourable for my presence (and presents) at a dinner in aid of the funds of the Something or other Society; an astounding offer of a book-case and the twenty handsome volumes of the Snippet Library of Imperishable Literature—for five shillings down and a subscription of sixpence a week for ten years; two coal circulars—lowest summer prices. A postcard from Aunt Sophie, threatening another call as soon as the motor-car has been repaired; a letter from the *Colosseum*——

I must sit down to this. Something has occurred. I had my dividend last month.

“DEAR SIR,—An Extraordinary General Meeting of the Shareholders will be held at the offices on Friday, July 10th next, to consider immediately necessary proposals concerning the future welfare of the Company. You are requested to either attend, or appoint a proxy by completing the attached form.

“Faithfully yours, etc.,

“JOHN CARRUTHERS, Secretary.”

Necessary proposals? What may these be,

and why immediately necessary? How dare the faithfully yours John Carruthers alarm me in this fashion, just as I am going to bed? Really, it might almost mean a "call"—but that's absurd. The *Colosseum* can't need capital.

I take up the evening paper, only glanced at until this moment. Bother Baillie, interrupting me with his love affairs! I turn the pages to see if by chance there is any comment referring to the *Colosseum*, or giving me a clue. Why could n't Carruthers say right out if there's anything wrong?

Nothing: that's good. The usual announcements in the literary column: "On the authority of the *Colosseum* we learn that Miss Blank's new book will be published in the early autumn by Mr. ——" And so on; every reference to the great periodical marked by the respect and consideration shown as of yore. The *Colosseum* says it: it is therefore right. We are safe in taking it for granted, etc., etc.

The clock strikes in the hall. Twelve—save us! What hours for Carbridge-on-the-Mole. I throw the paper down hastily on my desk; and even so my eye is attracted by a name, "The Burnaby Mystery."

I read, without much interest, in the stop-press column, that no further developments have occurred since the sensational disappearance of

Mr. Burnaby's brother. Burnaby? The name is n't uncommon, of course. I am moved to pick up the paper once more.

Ah! here it is. "The Burnaby Mystery.—We fear that the solution of the above will prove, after all, a very sordid romance. Absolutely trustworthy information came to hand this morning to the effect that Mr. Francis Burnaby, the well-known editor of the *Colosseum*, had not returned to his home since Tuesday last. His brother has been missing, as our readers are aware, for fully a week. Inquiries serve to show that the affairs of both Mr. Francis Burnaby and Mr. Henry Burnaby, the solicitor of Great St. Helens, are considerably involved; and an application in the Bankruptcy Court was made to-day in reference to Mr. Henry Burnaby. There is no doubt, in our minds, that the brothers have absconded. It is said that their failure will terribly prejudice many persons; the Great St. Helens firm having especially enjoyed the confidence of its clients to a wholly unprecedented degree."

My first feeling is one of rage. Frank Burnaby absconded! Coupled with Carruthers' note I can guess that he has played ducks and drakes with the accounts of the *Colosseum*. He has had complete and utter control; he was the kind of man who would! What idiots we have

been; the paper has been more than usually insufferably arrogant of late; more contemptuous than ever of everything. But its many pages of advertisements blinded us to the truth of the old adage, "Pride goeth before a fall."

Burnaby, too, who has presumed to cut up my reviews—to blue pencil my articles! Burnaby, whose violent antipathies have more than once brought the *Colosseum* perilously near the Law Courts. (I recollect that Henry Burnaby has invariably been the solicitor when libel actions have threatened!)

Burnaby, the brilliant epigrammatist, whose *Life of Queen Elizabeth* was, and is, one of the great books of our time. Capable, shrewd, indomitable, unerring fault-finder—sent to chastise authors for their manifold sins. I can say here, without hesitation, that Burnaby has had an astounding influence on literature. He has been head gardener for years to the whole estate; and such a head gardener! No weeds allowed; all bushes rigorously pruned in the spring (and autumn, if necessary); plants disbudded—that they may produce fine flowers only.

This has n't always come about. The process of disbudding is painful. It has been known to kill.

Burnaby: autocrat, genius—thief! There's a three in one, if you will. I expect he has simply

chosen to be a thief, just to astound the world, and to prove that our estimate of him has been entirely wide of the mark.

I suddenly observe that my headache is much worse, and go to bed feeling vexed with everybody.

CHAPTER VI

"ARE you better, Mr. Swift?"

"Quite myself again," I tell Honesty, senselessly, in reply to her questioning. She has stopped me from the vantage of her garden gate, and smiled upon my appearance of hurry.

"You are going to London?"

"Yes; now and every day, I expect. I find that one can't go on being lazy; one must work to live."

Honesty nods, and sets her little mouth primly. The smile gently disappears. "I am going to be a woman of business, I must tell you," she declares. "Mother has agreed to my taking up typewriting and I am learning quite cleverly. But you want to catch your train."

"Walk to the station with me," I meanly suggest; I fancy Baillie is not far away. "Come along as you are; you look very nice."

The smile returns. "Can you wait a moment? I want to show you some of my typing—" She flutters across her garden into the quiet hall, just as Baillie turns the end of the lane. Ridiculous of him to be so early.

Honesty soon finds a hat, and reappears, carrying a small roll of paper. "There you are. It's—it's a story. You are to admire the typing."

"And the story?"

"Perhaps. Now, here is something for you—because I want you to be very kind." She hands me a rose, which I insist on her pinning in my coat. This gives Baillie no excuse to stay as he passes us. He looks furious with us both, and Honesty flushes as pinkly charming as the rose itself, only more so. I have n't the gift of thinking pretty things like Baillie. "Morning to you, Jock—it's lovely weather."

"Aye," growls he, sulkily. "It's lovely enough—for some of us."

He glares at the poor little thing, and I know she is trembling. What wretches these lovers are. Next minute we are trotting along behind Mr. Baillie, who affects to be oblivious of the fact.

"Perhaps you may have heard—" begins Honesty; then comes to a full stop. She tries again. "I want you to like the typing very much," she goes on, awkwardly. "Because it is rather necessary——"

"Very necessary," I interrupt, "now that writing is n't taught in the schools."

"I mean it is necessary for me to do it, you know," she explains rapidly. "Mother has had

business bothers. You have heard of them, possibly; things do so get round when they're not pleasant." There is a bitter note in her fresh young voice which I don't like at all. "But *you* must know, even if gossip has n't told you," she continues. "We always regard you as a neighbour in the best sense, Mr. Swift. I am anxious, very anxious, to be able to earn a little money, and perhaps you would n't mind——"

"It would be a great privilege," I tell her, naturally. "I am able to help you, my dear child, and I will do so. I'll read your story in the train."

"Oh, you're not to think it's my story." She makes a quick gesture of denial. "I am only responsible for the typing."

"Who is the author?" I inquire. Honesty laughs mysteriously. I am to read the story, and then I shall guess. And, if I don't think the typing too awful, perhaps I'll try to get her some work?

How much a thousand? She shakes her head hopelessly. I am to fix the price; I know about *that*, of course.

We catch up Baillie, and, between us, win him to a better humour. When Honesty has left us, Baillie becomes communicative. He tells me, with fiery indignation, that Honesty is a pure lass, a brave lass, and that all lawyers are rogues.

"There are others," I suggest timidly; but just then the train arrives, and conversation is checked. When we are safely in the carriage he drops his paper, and pronounces lawyers to be the worst kind. I hear an incoherent account of it, gathered, as I can't help thinking, chiefly from imagination and the halfpenny press.

"She's so proud, she is. Not a word of complaint; not a syllable even hinting it. One would n't believe there was any trouble at all—to see the dear lassie. They say it's near ruin to them; they'll have to leave Carbridge——"

"No!" I interject.

"Yes," he asserts, emphatically. "How can they keep the place going? It costs money to live, even out in the country—as he has proved for himself."

"It costs money to live anywhere."

"Not so much in some places as in others. Of course, I am not in their confidence." He glances at me malevolently for a second, including the pink rose in my button-hole. I am tempted to vex him.

"Mrs. and Miss Dene will not leave Carbridge."

"I wish I could think it; but I'm fearing you won't believe the truth. You were always happy-go-lucky, Swift; always for wearing rose"

—(again he eyes my floral decoration)—“rose-coloured spectacles.”

“Miss Dene has saved the situation for herself,” I calmly instruct him. “She is a wonderful girl; she has learned typewriting.”

“Typewriting!”

“*And* shorthand, I make no doubt. I am going to be her agent; allow me to solicit you, sir. Authors’ manuscripts carefully corrected as regards spelling and grammar, and accurately typed. One shilling a thousand words——”

“I wish you might be serious, Swift.”

“I have never been more so. Here is a sample of our work; which you shall see—one of these days! My dear fellow, don’t look so ferocious. Mrs. Dene is my friend and yours; we can help her. She mustn’t leave Carbridge.”

Baillie leans forward, and, just as if we were not alone in the carriage, sinks his voice to a despairing whisper. “Man, it is n’t the help we can give that she can accept. Do you no ken it’s a crash for them? The scoundrel had all, I fear; it was in trust or something.” He groans almost. “My folk are amongst the trade creditors; by good luck we’re scarcely touched. But I’ve seen a schedule of the debts, and I’m telling you, Swift, it’s ruin for hundreds of poor souls.”

"Poor souls should n't invest in fishy concerns," say I, joking feebly. "They should be content with five per cent." Here I remember my own five per cent. in Gatherway's, and hastily move to other ground. "Don't think me heartless, Jock, because I refuse to take too deadly a view of it all. We're young yet—at least *you* are—and there is plenty of fight in us. I have had my own bothers of late, and, therefore, I go to London each day—in search of a fortune. The quest has not extended, so far, beyond reading—at the British Museum—but later on I'm going to write such a book. You shall have a presentation copy."

Even this fails to cheer Baillie. He is enjoying, in a melancholy way, an Oxford fit of the blues. He purses his lips, and wags his chin, and becomes particularly Scotch in aspect. I notice his prominent cheek-bones and the sandiness of his wiry hair. And yet I can't help liking him.

"Aye, I've heard," he growls. "It was the brother who bit you. A pretty pair. I would dearly like the handling of them."

At first I don't grasp it. "The brother? You don't mean that it's Burnaby?"

His chin still wags irritatingly. "Henry Burnaby, no less," he is saying, while my wits

go flying. It can't be; surely the world is bigger than this!

"Henry Burnaby, and he has been lawyer enough to hide it fine. The business has been rotten for years; barely assets to pay the costs of bankruptcy. Mortgage upon mortgage, his house and effects were seized before any one could act. I thought you knew."

I can only nod. I have heard him as from a distance. The train pulls up at a station, and other passengers enter our carriage. Further conversation is impossible, and Jock dives furiously into his halfpenny paper. I unfold my own news-sheet mechanically, but the print dances before my eyes. With an effort I bring my brain to attention.

I try to read the typescript given me by the dear lass. (Baillie, please. He put the expression into my vocabulary.) It is even worse than I could have dreamed—the story, I mean; the typing is—well, not altogether impossible. It's a romance about love, and moonshine in general. There is a poor young man in it; an oldish and opinionated entomologist, who seems a bit of a bore. There is (how did you guess?) a very sweet girl. The plot is of the slightest, and the style is vaguely familiar. I have a notion that I have read this story before.

But all these stories are alike, are n't they?

Little touches of what the author fondly conceives to be "local colour" put me on the scent. Dimly I discern Carbridge in it, and Baillie—or somebody much like him. The very sweet girl might be a dress-model for——

Yes, she might be a symbol for Honesty. She does not suggest anything approaching the original. An ill-focussed photograph, let us say, taken by an amateur who has just won a kodak in a raffle——

I have it! It is Baillie's story. He has dared to perpetrate prose. The 'prentice hand shows throughout; an absurd belief in ideals dominates all the characters—especially that of the butterfly-hunting ass of a fellow who marries the Very Sweet Girl at the conclusion. The youth goes to the "Salwanners, where the war is"; gets an honourable wound, and lightning promotion. It is all very touching; and quite untrue to life.

Still, it is rather "magaziney," if I may coin a word. I sent it to Rollaston, of the *Balmoral Monthly*, after I had taken off the ribbon and smoothed the "roll" out of the pages. Conceive Rollaston's face at sight of a neatly-rolled beribboned typescript!

I must advise Honesty what not to do when typing. She has much to learn; her spacing has n't attained perfection all at once.

This brings me back to thoughts of her trouble

—and Henry Burnaby. I feel myself responsible; it is certain that I have a right to insist upon her permitting that help which Baillie is so cocksure she won't accept. I am annoyed that Baillie should have learned so much of the Denes' private affairs; also that I should have known so little. I must be terribly self-centred, that's clear. Even Jones knew——

But servants always know everything.

CHAPTER VII

ROLLASTON of the *Balmoral Monthly* answers me almost by return of post. "Just the thing," he declares, in true editorially abrupt manner. "Tell your friend we'll take another when he likes. I suppose five guineas will be about it—for British serial rights? If so, please sign enclosed receipt. Why don't you always do this sort of stuff?"

Nice, is n't it? After years of literary work of a substantial description, and getting well into "Who's Who"—a mere tyro's effort is mistaken for your own, and you are congratulated upon it.

I take the receipt to the house next door. The garden has been dull of late. The weather has been changeable, and some of the nights quite cold. I have n't allowed Jones to talk. She would love to; but sees me uncongenial, and, apparently, utterly uninterested. She must think me a regular old curmudgeon.

I wish so much to find a plan by which I can help my good friends. My courage has failed me so far, and my power of invention. If Mrs.

Dene were only a man . . . it would be just as awkward!

Honesty is delighted with my news; so, evidently, Baillie need not be down-hearted. I find myself growing cross at the thought that she cares for him; although I have been certain of it throughout. This story will come out all wrong although he will get five guineas for it. He won't go to the Salwanners, where the war is. Not he.

"It is good of you," Honesty tells me, as we sit in the lamplight in the old-fashioned, sweet-smelling parlour of the Home. How very fragrant beeswax and turpentine can become when applied in the proper quantities to the proper kind of furniture. There is a refreshing atmosphere about me, and I *am* refreshed to perceive my friends so brave under misfortune. As Baillie said, one would never believe they had such trouble.

Perhaps he has exaggerated? I am satisfied that he has exaggerated. Mrs. Dene smiles at me from her seat by the table. She is sewing busily, and takes little part in the conversation. Honesty and I occupy the window seat.

"It is a pleasure," I am saying.

"And so quick, too," she cries. "Fancy selling the story, after all."

"Did n't you mean me to sell it?" I demand.

"Well, primarily, the idea was to show you how nicely I can type. Mr. Wright lets me use his typewriter; I did the story at his office. It was a tremendous joke—the Undertaker taught me the keyboard, and was most patient."

(Wright is a local house agent and surveyor. The Undertaker is his boy; a weird, prematurely ancient creature of quite sixteen years.)

"The typing, no doubt, did the trick," I remark. "And now we come to business. Will you kindly sign the receipt, then I will give you the money."

"I can't take that. I am only in it so far as the typing is concerned."

"Deduct your charges, and hand the balance to the author."

She glances at me, and flushes a little. She hesitates. Finally—"I don't think I ought to charge anything," she says, with something unaccountably like defiance in her tone. "You liked the story?"

"It was very pretty."

"Only pretty?"

I hedged. "Well, you can see for yourself it is more than that. Here are five guineas. I suppose I had better sign the receipt to save explanations with the editor. The story ought to have somebody's name to it, though, as author."

"Why don't you tell Mr. Swift, Honesty?" Her mother smiles up from her sewing.

"It would spoil it all," Honesty alleges.

"It seemed familiar to me, curiously enough—" I am beginning, then realise that this is rather rude if Baillie wrote the story. But Honesty is pleased to encourage me. "Yes, yes—go on!"

"Oh, that's all, you know. It reminded me of—of another story I've read. I admired the heroine; she was a dear."

Honesty relapses into little ripples of laughter at this; so totally unexpected as to quite flurry me. I could make nothing of her, and, to tell the truth, felt rather annoyed about it—for the moment. It seemed so ridiculous to make all this mystery over young Baillie and his writings, even if one were in love with him. I moved to the table and signed the receipt; then counted out five pounds and five shillings. "The story shall be anonymous, then?"

Honesty controlled herself with an effort. "If you please."

I prepared to go, but she begged me to take up the money.

"It's not mine," she stated, definitely refusing it.

"Give it to the author and tell him to write another as soon as he can. There's a market

for everything that's sentimental, and—Scotch.”

She picked up the five shillings and left the gold. “Is that too much, do you think?” she asked, her eyes steady before mine. A flicker of doubt clouded those forget-me-nots (bother Baillie, why does he talk such bosh).

“Exactly right,” I hastily and incorrectly informed her. (Two shillings a thousand words! Stark ruination for us poor authors.)

“Why did you say Scotch?” she inquired, her mind working. “You're not Scotch, are you?”

Woman's way. Makes a definite assertion, then queries it.

“I will give it to Baillie myself,” I said, throwing diplomacy to the winds.

She positively stared at me, this perplexing young thing, while Mrs. Dene chuckled suddenly. “You *must* tell him, Honesty,” she urged.

“Whatever can you think of me?” Honesty found breath to demand, really blushing. “Mr. Baillie?” She crushed me with “You must think very badly of me.”

“I'm sure I don't. I think very well of you.”

“You have no business to think of me at all—in such a way.” She collected the five little gold discs, and rattled them into the ticket pocket of my lounge coat. “Guess again, please—and meanwhile hold the stakes.” Then she was

struck by another aspect of the joke, and laughed again and again. It was so contagious that I laughed too—goodness knows why.

They made me stay to supper. I amused them with an account of Keedels the cat, who has lately taken to sleeping in the shed—to the extreme vexation of Jones. She very rightly argues that bed is the proper place for every one at nights. Keedels, however, remains at home all day, and starts off at dusk on peregrinations of his own. He returns when he thinks he will.

“If Jones were to lose her cat,” declared Honesty, “it would be an end to your peace of mind. She would simply leave you, books and all.”

“I should retire to a Home for Virtuous Bachelors, where we should have no visiting days,” I announced; “an Eden of perfect peace—Eves not admitted.”

“You poor things, would n’t you be lonely and would n’t you all get tired of hearing about each other’s virtues! No one to sympathise with you, and—listen. It would n’t be a paradise”—she peeped up at me—“it would be—the other place.”

“Honesty!” Her mother was shocked.

“It would not agree with you, Mr. Swift,” the naughty girl continued. “You’re too——”

“Too what?”

"Too fond of—Eves. I saw you with two—no, *three*—the other day."

"Aunt Sophie, Cousin Eva and——"

"Never mind. We won't press the point. Besides, your writing betrays you."

"But nobody reads my books."

"Don't fish, it's close time for compliments. I did n't mean your books, but your handwriting. Did n't you know I was a graphologist?"

"No—nor that you knew my handwriting."

That was a thrust for her. She parried it, and made *riposte*. She indicated the receipt, which still defied me from the far side of the table. Honesty took it up, flattened it out beside her. "Indicative of terrible characteristics—that loop and flourish. You must reform without delay."

"Won't you help in the great work?"

"She would only make you far worse," said Mrs. Dene, finally.

I do not believe that at all. I consider Baillie a lucky young man; and I wish I were in his broad-toed shoes. Going home (by the short cut through the sweetbriar hedge) I sighed. It occurred to me that Honesty, for all her high spirits, made a pathetic little figure. There was an under-note of sadness in her voice—so I fancied more than once. Mrs. Dene, too, was quieter even than usual, and seemed preoccupied.

I trust Baillie's surmise is n't anywhere near the truth.

I wonder who wrote that infernal story, and what I'm to do with this five pounds?

Happy thought: I'll buy Honesty a typewriter—she can't refuse that. She cannot go on using Wright's machine interminably; the Undertaker will get the sack, for sure! I'll see that the child has plenty to do; and the pay shall be as much per thousand as I can persuade her to accept.

Baillie must be encouraged also. It will be delightful to help these interesting young beginners. It makes one young oneself to help. How much does that boy earn per annum? Can I influence his prospects?

I recollect he is a Scotsman. These always prosper when they're steady—and sober.

How fine to be a genie, just to clap my hands, and build castles for all the folk I like! But I would n't alter Honesty's garden in one single, tiny particular.

CHAPTER VIII

IT is the unexpected that happens—exemplified once again. The Extraordinary General Meeting of Shareholders of the *Colosseum* elicits the fact that the late editor, managing director, and autocrat, Francis Burnaby, has availed himself pretty considerably of the trust reposed in him. He has been, in a fine and truly grand manner, employing to his own uses such of our funds as he has desired. Embezzlement, to put an ugly name to it, has been going on for years; and the auditors have been fairly easily hoodwinked with forged receipts and the like. Of course, we were all fearfully indignant—it's so easy to be wise after the event. But, in my heart, I don't wonder that the accountants were deceived. Who could doubt Burnaby in the old days?

An Oxford man, and a ripe scholar. A man who lived plainly in Chelsea, whose acquaintance was a privilege, and whose library a perpetual amazement and delight. If ever any one had the knack of collecting books in the real sense, it was Burnaby. Many's the browse I have had

Sunday afternoons, in that long, narrow room built across the house above the hall, so near to the Highway and yet so remote from its noises and bustle. He always had the book you wanted; and yet his was not a large collection. He knew just what you desired to know; the particular work was in your hands in a second. The backwaters of literature as well as its fairways, had been equally explored by this curious man: he could tell you the past, the present, and even the future of books. Some say because he damned them all; but this is not the fact. He was ever sparing of praise, but his judgment was wonderfully sound.

A musician, too. His criticisms of the present Italian school—bitter, destructive, wholesome—have done much to purify the too florid outpourings of those young geniuses. Burnaby was no mean executant; a warm admirer of Chopin, he had his melodies at command on a very sweet-toned German short-grand piano. To read whilst he played—well, those were divine moments.

And, under it all, a thief——

Worse, it appears. Still, God knows how strong are some temptations to some natures. I could not chorus the general condemnation, being pitifully aware of my own manifold sins—little mean sins.

Part of his discarded mantle descends on me; and this is where the unexpected occurs. I am to be sub-editor of the *Colosseum*. For my father's sake, I imagine. John Carruthers, still the secretary of the company, had a lot to do with the appointment—he is a kind fellow. There will be a reasonable salary to make up for my loss of dividends. Proper economy is to be the order of the day, and the directors evidently regard me as a reformer. The salary will be most welcome, because there is also a call. We all have to dip deeply into our balances to make good a vital part of the Burnaby defalcations. I foresee no holiday this year; but I don't mind. Carbridge is pleasant enough for an idle day or so. The fishing has been capital of late.

I am so busy with my new honours and work that I lose touch with Baillie. He has kept me posted hitherto with knowledge of the business affairs in our Comedy of Love. Now, for a little, I am shut off from it altogether: but I see no sign that weeds are getting the upper hand in the garden next door. Indeed, it looks more trim and charming than ever. The roses have passed their first stage, but now the perennials are showing flower. Giant phloxes, pentstemons, antirrhinums abound. Lilies are making the air heavy with perfume; carnations are gay-

est of the gay. Against the house the fig-tree is fruiting well; and the vine, too—although grapes can never ripen out of doors in an English climate. Astonishing how that old vine perseveres, though, year after year.

Honesty's dahlias appear promising; but bless me, how the cruel little maid pinches out the laterals and lower foliage. The dahlias are at the back of the house, planted full four feet apart, in a deadly straight line across the width of her garden. Behind them show well-covered poles of scarlet runners; in front are little round bushy dwarf beans. Useful and ornamental is Honesty's motto. Vegetables and flowers together, where possible. No inch of ground to be wasted.

Sweet-peas still flourish, and are stuck in the same way as the eating peas. She keeps both going well, by continually gathering the blossoms of the one and the velvety green pods of the other. In her small conservatory I can spy, by peeping when the door is wide, begonias double and single, zonal geraniums, and those kings of all house plants, gloxinias—while I know the hoya is in bloom. I had a glimpse of Baillie in the city one day, with a spray of it in his coat. It is really wicked to pick the hoya, as it always blossoms on the same spur.

Yesterday I heard it might be necessary for

me to run up to Edinburgh. Gatherway, strange creature that he is, has written earnestly from that city, begging me to come to him. He apologises briefly for his shortcomings; states that he has something very big in hand, which has taken all his energies and his money.

My money, too, I remember, frowningly. I am not to worry, but to come at once. A friend's help is essential, or he would n't have bothered. Knowing that I have some leisure (I have n't; that's all past and done with), he has ventured to take rooms for me at the Caledonian Hotel. He will meet the first train in on Saturday morning, so that I must travel Friday night. Only a dressing-bag for luggage, as he won't keep me more than a few days.

So he calmly arranges things.

I write rather nastily, "Sorry can't manage it. Have been appointed sub-editor on *Colosseum*, and start duties Monday. Had rather a shock there, as you can guess—and the money market is tight. Yours, Mortimer Swift."

He wired instantly, "You must come. Imperative. Gatherway."

Perhaps it would be as well to go. I have told Gatherway that I commence on Monday, which is true enough; but it's not Monday next—it's Monday fortnight.

Jones refuses to share my optimism concern-

ing our neighbours. I won't let her speak out, but she continues to let me know her opinion in various ways. I have n't been able to make that presentation of a typewriter, after all. Somehow, it has n't been so easy to arrange.

This afternoon, when I had returned from a hard read at the British Museum, I sat at tea in my den. My mirror occasionally showed me Honesty busy in her garden, and I felt very comfortable. Having done a good day's work, I had pleasure in witnessing some one else at it. Presently came the click of the latch, and Honesty glanced up—to see the Undertaker at her garden gate.

He bowed with all the dignity of an ancient Brummel—a comprehensive, flattering, self-effacing bow. A touch of colour burned his sallow cheeks temporarily. Honesty bade him enter. I perceived that he was carrying a large, important, and hideously blue letter.

He brought gloom with him, appropriately. The sun at that instant permitted a cloud to obscure its jolly face. With all the weight of his sixteen years, the Undertaker blighted Honesty's garden. Even she seemed pale, and older.

An obtrusive sigh caused me to attend to Jones. She had brought me another tea-cake, hot and buttery, from her kitchen fire. I had not heard her come in.

"That's twice to-day," she announced.

"Well, really, Jones—two tea-cakes are not much for a hungry man. You didn't mean to suggest——"

"I meant that there boy," she explained. "Him what's gone in next door. He fair gives me the 'orrors, with his fat, white face and creepy ways."

"I'm sure he's a very worthy, kind-hearted youth," I tell her, recollecting that he taught Honesty the keyboard of the typewriter; "and he can't help being fat in the face."

Jones sniffs. She is stoutish herself. "It's what he brings with him, then," she declares, obstinately. "Such a nasty business, too. Low, I calls it."

"Wright is an estate agent and surveyor," I inform Jones. "He attends to the letting of houses, and is a sharp, keen man. This boy——"

"He does the dirty work. Serving summonses, and all that. He puts the bailiffs in, he does."

I correct her. One must not allow ignorance to go unchecked.

"He does not serve summonses. He could n't; only a policeman can do that."

"That there letter had nothing good in it, I'm sure. It turned me quite cold like, the mere sight of it."

"Did any books come for me this morning?" I ask, to close the matter.

"Yes, sir. A parcel on your desk. And a gentleman called about some Queer Toes. He left his card and said he'd write."

I readily identify quartos, and nod. A dealer after my Shakespeare again: not the first one. "He may write," I remarked, placidly.

"Was it a book, sir?" Jones inquires, hovering.

"Books," I state; "the old books on the bottom shelf."

"Them skinny little brown square books? I should n't think they was worth taking away."

"They are worth at least a hundred pounds apiece. If I had the ninth volume they might be worth twice as much." I never can resist speaking largely about my chiefest treasure. I am moved to tell Jones how it came to me. A very dear old friend of mine had unearthed the quartos in a library formed by a book-loving ancestor. They had lain securely hidden away for over a century; they were offered to me as a gift. I declined them, naturally, although with a very bad pain somewhere inside me all the while. A year or so later, when the good fellow had passed to his rest, I found the quartos left to me at a price which, while satisfying the executors, was absurdly nominal.

I dilate on their beauties, and my rare fortune in possessing them. I am moved to inform her of my deep-seated hope that one day I may find the ninth quarto. "And then you 'll have them all bound together in a new cover, sir? They 'll look much nicer then, won't they—more valuable like?"

I very nearly faint away. Great heavens, rebind my precious quartos! I curl up, retire into myself like a snail whose horns have been suddenly touched with a red-hot hairpin. Jones luckily does n't notice. She cheerfully babbles on: "Jest fancy one of them books being worth over a hundred pounds. Why, you could sell them, one by one, if you was hard up. I expect some people would be glad if they had them Queer Toes, sir. They would n't need to be frightened each time they heard the door bell. Blue letters would n't worry them—not then."

She sighs again as she leaves me, being a sympathetic, if sadly mistaken creature. I light my pipe, frowning the while at thoughts which will rise up from this hotch-potch of conversation.

CHAPTER IX

I HAVE been to Edinburgh, and have borne with Gatherway. He has planned an amazingly cheap issue of the Classics, and had decided on everything—except the name for this series. I found him nearly distracted over what was positively a simple matter. I declared that since the issue was to be cheap, the name should indicate reasonableness in the sweetest degree; that since it was to be also amazing, miracles must be enticingly and solidly suggested. He fully concurred.

“The Little Marvel Library,” said I. “There you are!”

Gatherway had a million objections instantly; but, in the end, allowed that there was the germ of an idea in my first attempt at christening. He wishes me to be editor, take part shares, and to allow my dividends to stand over a while. He is a pleasant, optimistic fellow, and I agreed to everything. Aunt Sophie would dub me a confiding idiot; but I didn't invest a very large

further amount in Gatherways. However, I ought not to have risked a penny.

I had a shock when I returned to Carbridge. Honesty and her mother were on the up-platform of our station, surrounded by a litter of *impedimenta*. I crossed the line—being a privileged person—and greeted them with demands for a full explanation.

“Change is good for everybody,” said Honesty, in her valiant way; “*we* are going for a change.”

“How long will you be away?” I asked, feeling vaguely disappointed.

She glanced at her mother, then answered hesitatingly, “Oh, not long.” She seemed ill at ease. “Not very long, I should say. How have you enjoyed your Scotch trip, Mr. Swift? You have been gone nearly a week; did you know that?”

I was telling her all about it when their train was signalled. In the confusion I did n't discover where they were going. I had a sprig of early white heather in my coat, plucked from the highlands whilst walking with Gatherway. I gave it to Honesty when they were safely in their seats, poking it to her through the open carriage window. “That's for luck,” I said.

She took it with quite a disturbing gratitude. Mrs. Dene was carrying a bunch of garden flowers, and Honesty pulled one from it—a

columbine. "That's for remembrance," she said, in a strange little voice.

The guard whistled, the engine acknowledged the whistle piercingly. "I'll look after the garden for you," I promised cheerfully, as my friends were carried slowly away from me. "Mind and enjoy yourselves."

They both nodded; but, for the moment, I thought tears stood in Mrs. Dene's brave old eyes. Misgivings were in me as I waved and called after them, "Come back as soon as you can!" The window was hastily drawn up, and I saw no more. Curiously dashed, I turned to collect my own luggage, then walked slowly homewards. Honesty's garden was neat as a new pin, and more riotously beautiful than ever. Uncomfortable notions left me as I entered my own castle, with Jones and Keedels to welcome me.

So pass a few days, and I arrive at the Monday which is to see me an Important Person. A sub-editor—no less. I attend the dingy old office of the *Colosseum*; find the duties interesting, and more numerous than I had imagined. I am hard at it, drawing together the threads of the muddle Burnaby has left behind. John Carruthers is managing the concern, with the assistance of all the directors in turn. The result seems to be confusion worse confounded.

We must dismiss those directors. So long as they can draw their fees they won't much mind!

Returning home from my first day's sub-editing, with my importance in no wise abated, I encounter Baillie. He walks with me so far as Wright's office. He has little to say beyond generally criticising the weather and the Government; indeed, he seems quite down and uninteresting. Our house agent seems to be the fashion in Carbridge; even Baillie pauses at his door. I cry, jokingly, "House-hunting, Jock? Has it come to this at last?"

"It's not house-hunting I will be, Swift; no, it will not be that."

"You're after chairs and tables, then. Confess it—Wright has found you a bargain."

"It will be just a catalogue I'm wanting, Swift," says he, diving to meet the Undertaker, who now appears from the gloom of the office.

I dawdle a while, to give Baillie a chance to catch me up; but he is so slow that I come to the end of our road alone. As I near Honesty's garden I find myself speculating, for the hundredth time, where my neighbours may have gone—whether they are having a good time. I sincerely trust, yes; wishing I were away at the seaside also. But I could not lock up my house as they have done; although we are all utterly trustworthy in Carbridge, I should never be able

to sleep at night for dreaming that my quartos, or my Lowestoft, had been stolen.

Somebody is in Honesty's garden. I stop at the wicket-gate until the Somebody, feeling my inquisitive regard, starts guiltily, and looks up. It is—Jones! She is weeding; or was weeding. I am dumbfounded. Jones a gardener, and I never to have even suspected it. She is flushed with her exertions, and remarks, "Oh," in the true Jonesian manner. She is not precisely pleased, I gather. "I didn't think you was coming home so soon," she observes, with disapproval in every feature. She adds, remembering our respective social positions, "I can soon get you some tea, in course."

She recovers the hoe from the grass plot—which sadly needs mowing—and prepares to go into my domain, via the sweetbriar hedge. It is now my turn to disapprove. I can't have Jones trampling my flower beds, and I see she is carelessly dragging the hoe after her—plainly my hoe.

"Mrs. Dene has returned?" I question, with meaning. "There is a gate, Jones."

She is surprised at my firmness; and, after a sidelong glance, gives in. She decides to return in an orthodox manner to her kitchen. "I couldn't abear to see the garding getting so untidy," she excuses herself, when she is nearer.

"Them weeds do grow so fast; it's heart-breaking."

I begin to open the gate for her, and then suddenly catch sight of something which astonishes me so much that I involuntarily shut the gate again with a crash. There is a board up between the trees facing into the road, a house-agent's board—Wright's board. "Great Sale of Furniture and Effects."

Jones's hand is on the gate; she pulls it respectfully open. As in a dream I stand aside, and she passes out. I am unaware if she says anything; I am only conscious of terrible overwhelming surprise. In the distance I hear footsteps. Baillie? I can't face him; I can't face anybody. Almost at a run I win to the safety of my room, stumbling up the stairs in my hurry.

It's impossible! It *can't* be. From my window I can see the back of that hateful board, and know, with cold certainty, that it is not impossible at all. A man has paused to read the bill, that pitiful legend. Why doesn't he go on? It's not his business. It's Honesty's business. The inventory of a young maid's heart is there; the sweet, tender record of her life, day by day, since she was a little toddling mite. There are all her poor secrets, sir; ruthlessly, monstrously catalogued. You will be able to come close to them; appraise and bid

for them; and, perhaps, cart them away. They won't be the same. Their magic must go as soon as others handle them.

Surely you know every word on that board by now? I turn from the window impatiently. The gross curiosity of people! This fellow has been joined by two more; they are discussing the matter openly. I shall hear their comments if I don't close my window. I do this hastily. On my wash-stand is a tumbler of water, and a spray of columbine has withered in it. Poor little columbine, withered so soon. That's for remembrance. Brave little big heart, why couldn't you tell me? Baillie, too? But it shan't be! I *am* going to be a genie—an old, cross, perfectly unbearable bear; an astoundingly magical magician. I will make everything all right again, and you shall both be scolded severely, told not to do it any more—and handsomely forgiven.

Had you so soon forgotten I was a person of importance? A sub-editor; an author and critic, duly enshrined in "Who's Who"; a sleeping partner in Gatherway's; a man to whom money is practically a mere expression? Did you imagine for a moment that I was going to permit my sacred privacy to be invaded; to allow any Tom, Dick, or Harry to perambulate Honesty's garden?

Never.

I am a mass of nerves, and could n't tolerate those worthy young gentlemen under any circumstances. They would whistle comic songs, keep a tame gramophone, and generally break down my health. I'm selfish about my health. Honesty's garden must remain intact, and in full going order. The Home must remain untouched—save by the orthodox duster!

CHAPTER X

IN a more equable frame of mind I take tea; severely nip Jones's every attempt at conversation; and, having braced myself up to the encounter, sally forth to interview the Undertaker.

He is bland, sphinx-like, and intensely attentive. "You don't mean to say you have positively sold the place?" I cry, receiving my first check.

"I am pleased to state that Mr. Wright has been successful in disposing of the property," he answers, with heavy dignity.

"But, hang it! it has n't been in the open market five minutes," I argue, with some heat.

"It is a very exceptional property. In confidence, I may tell you that we had a standing offer for the house. So long ago as—let me see—" He opens a black and hearse-like ledger, and runs a business finger up the columns. "Since Whitsuntide in last year," he informs me, in hollow tones. "A client accidentally saw the garden then, and came to us at once.

He gave us figures to which we could safely go—" The Undertaker breathes sympathy with my regret. "Quite a bargain—oh, yes, it was certainly a bargain."

"Perhaps your client won't want it now—" He shakes his head gloomily. "The money has been paid, and the title-deeds have been made over. I am sorry you are too late, Mr. Swift. We should like to have obliged you."

"Mr. Wright is not in, I suppose?"

He resents this. "I have Mr. Wright's confidence," he begins, drawing himself up to his full five feet.

"Of course. I merely was wondering—" I pause, hardly seeing what I can do. Yet something must be done, and quickly.

"We shall be most happy to let *your* house, sir, if you contemplate moving." Business is in this boy to the tips of his long, sallow fingers. "We could arrange a sale of it on advantageous terms. Carbridge is a growing residential neighbourhood; we have plenty of inquiries at this minute for bijou modern cottages such as yours."

"I have no intention of leaving Carbridge. I want to buy the house next to mine, to—to——"

"Consolidate the property, sir? I understand perfectly. You wished to make a small estate of it. Quite so." He glances down upon his desk, his hands collect a mass of small litera-

ture. "Permit me to offer you a time-table, warranted correct. Our last list—some very charming little places you'll find in it. And a catalogue of the sale."

"Why, in the name of Fortune, is there to be a sale? Surely, if your client has bought——"

"Only the house, sir. The furniture was a speculation of Mr. Wright's. Mrs. Dene wished to entirely dispose of everything." Despite the weight of his sixteen years, I suddenly suspect that my Undertaker is keeping down his feelings with an effort. "Great loss to Carbridge—Mrs. Dene."

His weakish eyes, until now unwaveringly staring into mine, blink palpably. He pretends that he hears a call from the inner office, and, crossing to the baize door, opens it, glancing within.

"I could n't endure fresh neighbours; and that is the long and short of it," I snap out. "Mr. Wright must sell me Mrs. Dene's furniture as it stands, and get me the house. It's to be done, and you must do it. You can do it."

He returns with alacrity. "As regards the furniture, we shall be most happy——"

"No, you won't! The furniture goes with the house, if I buy. I will take the place, lock, stock, and barrel, at a reasonable valuation, or

I'll take nothing. Let me know in the morning without fail."

The Undertaker makes copious notes in his diary. "To what extent will you permit us to bid?"

"I will buy the whole at your price," I state, thoroughly determined to be rash. "I can't have other people in Honesty's—in Miss Dene's garden. I should have to put up a ten-foot fence——"

He interrupts me, with gentle deprecation. "You surely cannot mean that?"

"I do mean it. Your client had better sell. Tell him it will be a ten-foot fence, tarred, and spiked with nails. I shall tear up the sweet-briar—it's on my ground."

The Undertaker smiles faintly; he knows the law. I should n't be able to do it. "Can't you see how intolerable it would be?" I urge; "I don't only mean the fence—but to have strangers practically *in* your house? I am convinced that Mrs. Dene will wish to come back. In point of fact, I know she will come back. Well, then, her home will be there, all ready for her. I shall be prepared to make it over to Mrs. Dene, complete and intact. I shall keep the garden neat, and do my level best."

I realise that I am talking to this boy as though it were quite in his power to arrange

things. One gets in a way of being friendly with the Carbridge folk; but this is letting myself go terribly. I shall have the Undertaker slapping me on the back and calling me "old man," in a minute or so. Yes; actually he's feeling for his cigarette case; he's going to offer me——

It's his handkerchief he is after. His eyes are blinking in a manner eminently suitable to an undertaker. "I was allowed the pleasure of teaching Miss Dene how to typewrite—" He gulps, chokes, recovers control of himself—"a great privilege; a very real pleasure. . . . We will make this a personal matter, sir, if you will be so good as to leave it all in our hands."

I nod, and hastily retire. The Undertaker follows me to the door, respectfully waits until I am well on my way home ere closing it. When I glance back, the ridiculous creature is bowing gravely to the various home-coming Carbridgians just in by the train.

I go home, but cannot work in the garden. That detestable board attracts everybody. I shall swear more than is good for my peace of mind and my position as a sub-editor.

Sub-editors are, comparatively, minions. They may not swear, save with bated breath. Any editor will tell you that.

I rake out the Alfred book, and have a grind

at it. Then read my notes for the new work I am contemplating, that one which is to set the Thames afire.

Poor dear old river, you may flow on quite serenely. I expect you will be able to remain as unsilvery as ever, notwithstanding all my bold endeavours.

Later on in the evening, a funereal knock is heard at the front door. Jones, with hostility sounding in the very creak of her shoes, goes to answer the summons. How dare folk come at such an hour! (It is about ten o'clock.) I hear her sharp tones contrasting with an apologetic mumble; she enters my study to announce: "That there boy from the estate office—he is a nuisance—wants to see you sir, very particular. I told him you would n't like being disturbed." She means she does n't like being disturbed.

I find my Undertaker in the parlour. He smiles nervously. He is no longer on his own ground. "I am really most sorry, sir," he begins, in a deep bass. I indicate a seat. "No, I thank you. If you will permit, I will state my errand very briefly." (The absurd dignity of the creature—he might be about to break terrible news! The smile has entirely vanished, his hand is waving about in wide gestures of sympathy.) "I was fortunately able to have a conversation with Mr. Wright soon after your

honoured visit. He regrets extremely that he should have been absent at the moment of your call. So far as Messrs. Wright and Co. are concerned, sir, the furniture and effects of the property next door are yours at the barest margin of profit to ourselves."

"Yes, but the house?"

"The purchaser of the freehold will be in Carbridge to-morrow. He paid Mrs. Dene, through us, the sum of twelve hundred and sixty pounds—twelve hundred guineas. There is considerable land attaching to the property. Mr. Wright wishes to know the exact limit you will allow us to touch."

The sum is rather more than I had imagined. However, I am resolute. "I shall leave it with you," I say, firmly. "Do the best you can for me. Settle it to-morrow; and telephone to me in London, if necessary." I give him my number at the *Colosseum*. "Also, I should like to have the inventory of the furniture. I want that notice-board to be removed, and to have the whole affair off my mind. I suppose you have Mrs. Dene's address?"

"No, sir. Mrs. Dene has not favoured us. We understood she was uncertain of her movements for the immediate present."

"But, surely, there will be other matters to close?"

"Everything was disposed of before Mrs. Dene left Carbridge. The money was paid over. If you will excuse me, sir, I will not trouble you any longer." He bows, and sidles to the door. "Good-evening, sir; thank you very much. Your commands shall be carried out quite to the best of our ability."

He refuses a glass of wine and a biscuit; bows again, and vanishes. I go back to the study to spend an hour or so figuring it all out. Tomorrow I will call at the bank and ascertain my balance there. I much fear that it is, like myself, rather low. A depression is over me, caused by too much Undertaker—and that nightmare of "Great Sale of Furniture and Effects."

That shan't be, at any rate. Despite my ultimatum to Messrs. Wright and Co., I shall buy the furniture, no matter who wins Honesty's garden. I will release the spirit of her home, at least, from profane and vulgar regard.

Memory of Jones's remark comes to me and I stoop for my Shakespeare. I reverently draw out the first one of the series. Evidently they were all bound together at the outset by the original collector of them. The volume probably included a ninth play, which has, unfortunately for me, gone astray. Students of Shakespeare will know that Capell published his edition of *Comedies, Histories, and Tragedies* in folio in

the year 1768; and, no doubt, when Edward Capell came across my now eight ninths of a book, he broke it up to suit his own convenience, and some one, thereupon, lost play number nine! In the Capell collection at Trinity College, Cambridge, there are nine quartos only that attain these measurements: seven-and-a-half-inches by five-and-a-half, and they are bound up in two volumes. In the Garrick collection there are nine plays, all of this identical size.

These eight little quartos of mine, whether broken by Capell or some other vandal, belonged in 1780 to Master John Dering, who I can easily picture as a worthy old gentleman, with the love of books deep in his heart. His name, in small, irregular gold lettering, appears on the brown calf cover of each play; below his name, the date that each was acquired. In three years he had obtained five of them, then comes a gap; 1779 saw the next; 1780 witnessed the purchase of two more. Now for the last, thinks Master Dering—number nine, his appetite keenly whetted by the acquisition of number eight, which is that jolly business invented hastily at the command of good Queen Bess—who had the whimsy to see Falstaff in love!

“A most pleasant and excellent conceited comedy of Sir Iohn Falstaffe, and the Merrie Wives of Windsor. With the swaggering vaine

of ancient Pistoll and Corporal Nym. Written by W. Shakespeare——”

And originally printed for *Arthur Johnson*, in the yeare 1619.

Here are Master Dering's first finds:

(1) The whole contention between the two Famous Houses, Lancaster and Yorke. With the Tragicall ends of the good Duke Humfrey, Richard Duke of Yorke, and King Henry the Sixt. Divided into two parts: and newly corrected and enlarged, Written by William Shakespeare, Gent. *Printed at London for T. P.*

This is the book I have in my hand; next to it is:

(2) A Midsommer nights Dreame. As it hath beene sundry times publickely acted by the Right Honourable, the Lord Chamberlaine his servants. Written by William Shakespeare. *Printed by James Roberts*, 1600.

(3) The first part Of the true & honourable history, of the Life of Sir John Old-castle, the good Lord Cobham——

Many declare this play is n't Shakespeare at all.

(4) The excellent History of the Merchant of Venice.

(5) The Chronicle History of Henry the fift, with his battell fought at Agin-court in France.

These were the commencement with Master

Dering, and these opened his eyes, now closed for ever. How often has he tenderly handled my wonderful faintly musty quartos; how often will others, after me, handle them? Why—oh, why did n't he discover that ninth play? This I make to be the "Yorkshire Tragedie. Not so New, as Lamentable and True." The Garrick collection shows this in the same unusual size. Dering *ought* to have lived long enough to have recovered it!

You may as well know the other two I have. The page can be skipped by readers not interested in Shakesperiana.

(6) M. William Shakespeare, His True Chronicle History of the life and death of King Lear, and his three Daughters.

(7) The late and much admired Play called Pericles, Prince of Tyre.

I wonder if Master Dering sees me now, with his books? Shall I be granted the sorrowful joy of watching those others who, later, will prize these priceless volumes?

It is plainly time for me to go to bed. At the back of my mind there lurks a spectre, conjured by Jones. If Honesty had these treasures of mine, she might—under certain circumstances, please—be greatly tempted to sell them!

CHAPTER XI

It is arranged that I shall own Honesty's garden and her home, and all the appurtenances belonging thereto. The previous purchaser has been made to perceive himself as being too previous—the result of sombre and funereal machinations perpetrated by the Undertaker.

The sum total of the purchase money is appalling, and scrutiny of my bank-book confounds me. I have n't enough!

But the excellent conceited plot of having Honesty for my tenant shall be hatched successfully, come what may. I have gone too far, in any event. I could never raise my head in the presence of the Undertaker were I to even attempt to back out of it now.

I must do something heroic. I will sell a few (a very few) of my books.

Therefore, I called to-day at Joynson's, in Chancery Lane. I know the younger Joynson; a charming fellow—but very busy. He and his brother conduct the great sale room, where nearly every week one may find bargains—if other people are n't looking! Joynson, junior,

glanced with his bright eyes adown the list presented confidently by me.

"Rather early in the year for these. I'll catalogue them, if you press it."

"I rather wanted to——"

"Make room for others?" He suggested it tactfully. "Of course. I'll sprinkle them in the list for week after next. They'll fetch enough to pay for new shelves—besides giving immediate room for any fresh purchases."

I was aghast. "Only enough to pay for new shelves? Surely——"

"Bad time to sell such stuff," he decided, bluntly. "Early autumn for decadent work. Fall of the leaf, earth to earth, ashes to—those who have a taste for Dead Sea fruit! Autumn's the boy for your cast-outs, Swift. Pity you have n't a folio Shakespeare—if you really need ready cash, and plenty of it. I sold eight plays bound together just prior to the issue of the first folio, only this afternoon. For—how much d'you think?"

"Three hundred?" I suggested, trying to appear indifferent. Strange, was it not, that this imagined temptation of Honesty's should so soon be dangled before me? I'm not going to be tempted, however. Dear me, no!

"It was an edition published in 1620, or thereabouts. I verily believe the copy we had

to-day was part of a 'remainder.' Sounds impossible, does n't it? However, there it was, eight in one—all beautifully fresh, considering. It was being sold as part of an estate just clear of Chancery. A Yankee secured it for—guess again."

"I have n't an idea. A thousand pounds?" (I hoped I had overshot it; the poison was entering my system!)

Joynson unconsciously fell into his American patron's nasal accent. "Two thousand *and* eighty-six! I'm just standing myself a long drink."

I suppose I gasped, or looked incredulous—for he rattled on, quite forgetting his "busyness" in the excitement of telling the tale. "You'll see it in the papers to-morrow morning. We all felt a bit out of the 'ornery.' That's so. Wait till I get my hat." He bustled into the small, dark office at the side of the sale room; and bustled out again ere I could recover.

I did n't enjoy the long drink—although Joynson paid. Imprudently I told Joynson of my quartos. It seems they are eight different plays from those bought by the American. Joynson invited himself to Carbridge: would have come then and there—if I had n't, luckily and pluckily, invented an excuse that served to prevent him.

This evening has been spent with the Alfred

book. I am going to finish it off, and according to Gatherway's suggestions. He shall pay me royalties on account, enough to enable me to clinch my purchase of Honesty's garden.

I did n't work well, however. My mind was n't—is n't—free. Thank goodness, that board has gone from Honesty's—from *my* garden. Dear gossips of Carbridge, there will be no Great Sale!

I must interview Baillie, and extract from him knowledge of Mrs. Dene's present whereabouts. This young fellow has kept aloof of late. Since Mahomet won't come to the mountain, the mountain (myself) shall go to Jock Baillie!

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I make it my business to waylay him. He seems disposed to be taciturn. To bring the matter round to the point at which I can strike, I remark, casually, "You will not need that catalogue, Jock. Honesty's garden is out of the market."

"I've heard," said he, briefly.

"I don't take possession for a while. My plans are not yet matured." I eyed him; it really is very good of me to think of selling my Shakespeare——

I mean—finishing my Alfred book and closing

my banking account—just to put Baillie into the house. It's more than generous. Aunt Sophie would call it midsummer madness. Meanwhile, the young gentleman preserved a stony silence. We had walked from the station until we were near my house—my houses, I should say.

"I have the keys, of course," I prattled on, cheerfully. "Would you care to come in?" The inventory has not yet been called over by the Undertaker, but Messrs. Wright and Co. trust me with the keys, for all that. Baillie paused undecidedly. "Come along," I urged.

"I'm no sure I should na be ganging—" began Jock Baillie, Scotch because he was nervous with me, for some reason. I took his arm, and we entered the garden.

As a matter of fact, I was feeling rather ill at ease myself. I required the moral support of Baillie's presence—the place was full of ghosts. Daylight ghosts, too—memories. They're the worst kind.

Jones has endeavoured to cope with the weeds; not with overpowering success. "I must have the gardener to it," I told Jock, in a confident voice—just to cheer us both. "It's surprising how the weeds seem to know when a garden's at their mercy. Scarcely a week ago——"

"Nine days," Jock corrected me, carefully.

"Is it so long?" (What a stupid thing to say!)

"You don't miss your neighbours, Swift—it's plain. It will be your books you're thinking about most of the time."

"Not all the time," I protested. "But, really, how quickly the days fly! Easily explained, all these weeds, then. Let us go into the house; although I fear it will be sad inside there with the folk away."

At the door he disengaged his arm. "I will not be going into the hoose with you, Swift," said he, abruptly.

"You must," I insisted. "I can't go in alone."

He regarded me thoughtfully. "It is your ain hoose," he argued.

"Yes, but—do come along, there's a good fellow. It's so uncanny being in an empty place by oneself."

"I will not be going into *her* hoose. It is a sacrilege."

"You're afraid!" I cried, trying to laugh it off. "You must learn to conquer that feeling, Jock. You will often have to cross this threshold in the future."

He stared back into my own steady regard: he wavered—yielded. I turned the key, and gently thrust open the door; then stood aside

for him to enter. "I will follow you," he decided, mulishly.

"I'm fearful you'll run away, so soon as my back is turned. Promise now that you won't!"

We were in the small, stone-flagged hall next instant. "The clock has stoppit," whispered Baillie, who had taken off his hat as though he were in a church.

"No clock will go on for ever," I answered, pettishly.

"Eh, but it's lonesome," he added. "It's just a hoose that's dead."

"Nothing of the sort. A house that's—sleeping. We'll soon rouse it, Jock. Here goes." I found the key, and very boldly wound up the old grandfather clock. His slow, comforting "tick-tack" recommenced. I hammered the gong next, until its reverberations filled the whole place. "Wake up, everybody!" I called, heartily—"Somebody's at the front door waiting to be asked to come in."

Baillie gave a fearful glance behind. "There is n't a soul, living or—— The de'il tak us!"

There is a soul, to give him ground for his exclamation. But it is not the "de'il." Merely the next best thing; my Undertaker. As usual, he was bowing with ponderous gravity.

When he came up he thus excused the intrusion. "I ventured to follow you, sir. I thought

perhaps you would wish to have the detailed list which Miss Dene herself gave us. If you will kindly check each item we should prefer it."

"Oh, not at all. I am quite satisfied that everything is in order."

"As a matter of business, sir," he persisted. "If you have the leisure we could begin this evening. I can wait upon you at any hour. It would be more satisfactory."

"Mr. Baillie and I will examine the list together," I announced.

"As you please, sir." The Undertaker bowed, disappointedly, I could n't help thinking, and, with reluctant steps, passed the length of Honesty's garden. An impulse made me shout after him, "The garden's getting into a shocking state, is n't it? I suppose you don't know of anybody who could take it in hand?"

He came back almost at a run. "I—indeed—if I might make so bold—" he stuttered. "That is, I attend entirely to my mother's garden——"

"You? But have you any opportunity?"

"Eh, but I'm doing gairdening, Swift," sharply interrupted Baillie, plainly meaning me to refuse the Undertaker forthwith. "If it's just a bit mowing needs to be done, and a bit weeding—I'll gie ye a hand o' nights."

"If I might be permitted, Mr. Baillie," pleaded the other, wringing his thin fingers to-

gether. "I'm sure you'll forgive me, sir, for presuming to offer my services—but I am in Carbridge all day; and from twelve to two I have really nothing to think about. It would be such a pleasure to me to be allowed to do the verges. I understand the machine, Mr. Baillie; it's a little tricky at times——"

"How do you know that?" I requested.

"I have presumed to try it, sir. The grass seemed to be so long and so untidy. Miss Jones expressed her belief that you would not altogether disapprove."

"It's very kind of you, I'm sure." I was somewhat nonplussed. These two heroes were eyeing each other. Odd they should both be so keen. Gardening is not a virtue, as a rule, very vigorous in the modern young man. I turned to Jock. "Don't you feel it would be kind of our friend here to keep the lawn trimmed for us?"

"And the verges," breathed the Undertaker, anxiously. "They're really rather back-breaking, but I don't mind."

"To trim the lawn and the verges, Jock?" I coaxed. "They are back-breaking, I can assure you. Have you ever heard of 'gardener's hinge'? That comes through trimming verges."

"It is your gairden, Swift, of course," said Master Jock, coldly.

"No," said I earnestly. "Not mine, Jock. Honesty's—and always will be. Let us divide duties. I will do the rolling of the paths, it's exercise that will keep me fit. You shall do the weeding, it will not be much if we work little and often." I turned to the Undertaker, who was positively trembling with eagerness—"You shall do the verges, and Jones shall pick the withered flowers. There, that's settled. Let us all go in to my house, and seal the compact." I locked the door of the house quietly behind me, and led the way back through the gap in the sweetbriar hedge. Jock, with affected carelessness, plucked a rosebud from the garden, while the Undertaker, pretending to tie his shoe-lace, stole a pansy. They thought I didn't notice, either the one—or the other!

CHAPTER XII

JOYNSON has come, has seen—has conquered. That is, he has talked me into permitting him to catalogue my quartos in the next sale but one. He can't get them in before, as the necessary arrangements will not permit.

He pointed out to me, cogently:

First: That I could n't hope to buy the American's quartos: whereas he could hope to buy mine.

Second: What good could it be to anybody to possess eight of the plays? They did n't even make a complete volume, let alone a collection. It was like owning the tail of a dog.

Third: Supposing I had a fire, and the quartos were consumed, as might easily happen? Did I imagine there was any fire insurance company in the world who would pay me a tithe of what the quartos were undoubtedly worth?

Fourth: The market was absolutely right for Shakespeare quartos; the chance of getting a tip-top price might never occur again—more-

over, the American had n't gone back. Joynson knew where he was staying.

I am bound to confess (within myself) that the amount I am likely to get, as royalties on account, for the Alfred book (even if I finish revising it) won't run into three figures. My editing of Gatherway's series of classics, the *Little Marvels*, progresses; and the first two are on the stocks. But here again I shall have to wait before seeing any return.

So I allow Joynson to catalogue my quartos, although with a heavy heart.

Meanwhile, the garden next door is receiving plenty of attention. Never has the lawn been so scrupulously mown, nor the verges so carefully cut and edged. There is not a weed to be seen in the beds; and withered flowers are scarcely given a moment's grace. The paths are superbly rolled. I do that.

I wonder how often those young things, *the* *dramatis personæ* of our comedy, write to each other? and what they find new to say each time they write? Honesty might grant a moment's leisure in which to let *me* know where she is——

They don't consider old fogies, these lovers. Why should they, after all? Later on, perhaps——

I never spy those silent couples in the lanes

about Carbridge, standing so close to each other in the soft, kindly shadows, so full of dreams, so utterly happy—without being (scornfully perhaps) a little jealous. I don't seem to have ever been young like that—I feel I have been defrauded. Folk laugh and nod meaningly when they chance upon lovers—forgetting (foolish creatures!) their own glorious days. I would n't want to forget: I can't be harsh, even in thought, with Phyllis—or Corydon. It won't be always like that, my poor dears. Summer nights come to an end all too soon: you may discover, when it's irrevocable, that you are both very human, very inconsistent, both possessing little tempers of your own. In broad daylight Corydon observes that Phyllis has—freckles! She sees that he notices: now's the instant to remember your tender speeches, your sweet silences; do not drop hands, but rather hold together all the more.

Corydon finds that even a small house costs the dickens and all to keep up; it's all work, work, to keep pace with the bills. Phyllis wants pretty clothes—(one can't *keep* pretty without pretty clothes!) Dear me, what worries for both of you. But (between ourselves) is n't it worth the worry? You're together, you love each other; the little home is very beautiful—while you love each other.

Shall I, one of these days, witness Honesty beginning to suspect that romance begins and ends in summer? Shall I know Baillie grown indifferent, and matter-of-fact? If I imagined that there was ever the least chance of such vile happenings I would n't sell my quartos.

However, I don't imagine anything so impossible.

Aunt Sophie, Eva, and Miss Harrison finely surprise us one evening. We are all hard at it, when sudden thunder and toot-tootlings proclaim the advent of the motor-car.

I cease rolling, and give the word: "Prepare to receive cavalry."

Jones scoots through the sweetbriar hedge; I hastily plunge after her. The weedy-looking youth, now in full motor rig, is handing the ladies out. The Undertaker pauses in his mowing, and critically examines the verges. Baillie stands at attention.

"My *dear* Mortimer!"

Aunt Sophie is upon me. "What roads, my dear man! Really awful. Goodness knows how many people we have killed; I don't like to think about it. The dust, and the stupidity of your villagers! Do they know which is the right side of the road, Mortimer; are they *totally* deficient in common-sense?"

"Well, aunt—we're rather quiet down here.

We get in a way of believing that the earth is partly to be walked upon, after all. Our carts certainly do tack up our hills—they always have tacked, you know. We don't loiter on the permanent way in front of expresses; and we therefore expect expresses not to wildly tear up and down our lanes."

Miss Harrison smiles indulgently, showing her nice teeth. "We don't wildly tear up and down anything, Mr. Swift. I'm sure we have been quite twenty-eight minutes travelling here; and it's no more than twelve miles."

"Besides," interrupts Eva, who has been eyeing Baillie surreptitiously—"Besides, didn't they say all that when trains were first invented? And who travels on a coach now, I would like to know? If you aren't screamingly glad to see us, Cousin Mortimer, after we have taken all the trouble to come——"

"I am most delighted to see you," I hastily interpose. "Nice-looking cousins are always welcome at Carbridge—especially when they bring nice-looking friends. You are just in time for early supper; Jones has rushed in to lay extra plates for you. Can't you hear her rattling them?" I beckon Baillie, who really is staring—"Now Jock, come here, please. I want you to know my Aunt Sophie." He comes with alacrity through the gap in the sweetbriar

—"Mrs. Duveen, Mr. Baillie. My Cousin Eva, a very naughty girl. Also her friend, my friend, and, I hope, to be your friend—Miss Harrison. There you are!"

"Quite a master of the ceremonies, Mortimer," says Aunt Sophie. "You take my breath away. Mr. Baillie, I have come down to Carbridge to-night to ask my nephew a great favour. I trust you 'll persuade him to grant it."

"It's granted before you ask, aunt—so long as it does n't involve a ride in the motor."

"It's worse," says Eva cheerfully. "We 'll break it to you later on." She glances towards the Undertaker, who is still raptly absorbed in contemplation of the verges next door. "I hope we were n't disturbing you?"

"We were just doing a bit gairdening," Baillie tells her importantly. "It's exercise, and Mrs. Dene's away the whiles. Swift's the tidy man."

"We're all tidy in Carbridge," I explain. "It is our unfortunate habit. Please come in, everybody." I nod to the Undertaker dismissively, and lead the way indoors. Aunt Sophie takes my arm; the weedy-looking youth greets the Undertaker—as he emerges, rather forlornly, from Honesty's garden—with a peremptory request for the loan of a "spanner."

"Now Mortimer, I want you to be kind to an old woman," begins my aunt. "Your uncle is

feeling very run down and *low*. I am sending him off next week to Aix, but shall never get him further than Newhaven unless I can count on you."

"I can't go to Aix," I argue. "I have n't the leisure; nor the means."

"You need n't worry about the latter," says my aunt, decidedly. "Your uncle must be taken to Aix, properly installed there, and a course of baths must be arranged for him. He is as obstinate, Mortimer, as—most men, and he is nearly doubled up with rheumatism. He has been dosing himself with lithia—until he is sufficiently depressed to commit suicide in forty different ways."

"I know a splendid cure for rheumatism, aunt. It's quite infallible, an *elixir vitæ*. It's so simple that you'll laugh——"

"Then I had rather not hear anything about it." Aunt Sophie is firm. "I want to be quite serious, Mortimer. If you have a remedy for rheumatism, I should strongly advise you to patent it; give it a catchpenny name, and then advertise in all the Sunday newspapers. You'll make a fortune. But, first, I desire you to try to please an old woman—by taking your uncle to the baths at Aix."

We have all arrived in the parlour by this. Through the window I can dimly perceive the

legs of the weedy youth and the arms of the Undertaker amicably waving about from under the works of the motor. Those two are happy for the immediate present. I seat my guests round the table; Aunt Sophie takes the end and I the top. Eva and Baillie arrange themselves side by side, while Miss Harrison takes my right hand. The situation is temporarily saved: but as soon as all are served with cold sirloin, salad, or chutnee (according to taste), aunt renews the attack.

"This is the notion, Mortimer, and Mr. Baillie, please say he must accept. We all meet next Sunday morning at 9.30 at Victoria, and take the boat-train to Newhaven. Then on to Dieppe, by half-past three. At Dieppe I, and Eva, and Kitty Harrison are going to spend a fortnight—not a day more. Just quietly, Mortimer, at some little hotel off the front."

"We thought of the *Hôtel de Paris*," says Eva. "Or the *Chariot d'Or*."

"I generally put up at the *Hôtel du Rhin*," I remark, imprudently. There is a chorus, "How jolly! Then you know Dieppe, Mortimer? That's splendid; you'll be able to see us all fixed up before going on to Aix."

"My dear aunt," say I, with determination, "you must please not count on me. I have just

commenced my new duties as sub-editor of the *Colosseum*."

"Surely you could get a few days' leave?" Aunt Sophie urges. "A week-end, Mortimer—say Sunday until the following Monday week?"

A week-end! "Of course, I should love to go with you," I continue. "Dieppe is a delightful little place. Those who go through it, *en route* to Paris, only see the quay, and so get a totally wrong idea of a charming little town. The Casino is most amusing—you must join directly you arrive, taking a family ticket. That's much cheaper."

"Oh, won't it be splendid, Kit?" breathes Eva. "We shall want you to stay all the time, Cousin Mortimer."

"You'll give us a look-up on your return, you know," adds Aunt Sophie. "Please pass me the claret. What a sweet jug, Mortimer."

"Old Bohemian," I manage to throw in. She rattles on: "Yes, that's how we have planned it. Your uncle and you to go to Aix, on the second or third day. You install him comfortably, and stay as long as you will. Then back to Dieppe, and take your reward with us. Eva and I will promise that you shall do just what you like, and—understand, Mortimer—you are to be your uncle's guest. He simply won't go under any other arrangement."

They very nearly talk me into it, between them. Eventually I compromise by agreeing to take them all to Dieppe, where, having found Aunt Sophie and the girls a comfortable *pension*, I will start my worthy uncle off to Aix. I shall then promptly return to London. It will mean being away from Sunday next to the Wednesday or Thursday.

"So you soon will be back to your garden-ing," says Eva, maliciously. "Mrs. Dene may be home by then. I hope you'll send her in a big bill, all of you—for keeping her garden so tidy."

Baillie, not catching my warning glance, remarks innocently: "It will be Swift's own gairden, ye ken. It's the bill *I* will be sending to friend Mortimer here presently—for weeding and hoeing and the like."

"I meant Mrs. Dene's garden more particularly," Eva tells him, with a sly twinkle for both of us.

"'Tis all one—" Baillie answers, perplexed at my frowns, of which he is at last aware. I am conscious that Eva and Aunt Sophie are regarding me very curiously. "Mrs. Dene has left Carbridge," I announce, taking a bold plunge. "I have bought her house and garden rather than endure fresh neighbours. That was why we were all so busy when you came down."

Aunt Sophie opens her mouth; shuts it on a single word, with an obvious effort. "Oh?"

"Oh?" echoes Eva.

Miss Harrison merely smiles, irritatingly. Whenever people have nice teeth they always smile at every opportunity.

"Yes," say I, closing the subject, "that was why we were all so busy. Let me give you some pie, aunt—I can recommend it strongly. Cream, too. Direct from Devon. I have it from Lynmouth once a week, all the year round."

CHAPTER XIII

I CAN scarcely realise what has happened to-day. A strange mixture of emotions is chaotically rioting through me.

An awful reflection recurs perpetually. But let me begin at the beginning; and, while writing it all down, reason with myself that everything has chanced for the best.

Since Aunt Sophie had instructed me that Uncle Duveen had been obliged to postpone the Aix-les-Bains trip, I have enjoyed peace—of a sort. Baillie and the Undertaker and Jones have worked with tolerable amiability with me in the gardens, on fine nights. Jock, however, seemed childishly upset on that evening when Eva and Miss Harrison motored over to Carbridge to bring me aunt's letter, and properly explain why the Dieppe holiday was not to be. I asked them if they would care to go over my new property.

Jock came, too—after again saying he would n't. It was when we were admiring Honesty's own little room that I first began to

notice his agitation. It is a small nest—as sweet as a young maid's heart: the casement window is draped with pink, dainty curtains; the wall-paper has pink roses garlanded across a pale-blue ground. I had put some silver brushes and things upon the toilet table, and Jones had cut blush roses for a big bowl standing on a little table.

Eva and Miss Kitty had no false sentiment. My youthful cousin appeared to find everything most interesting. She and the other girl—the one with the nice teeth—stayed a little while afterwards with us; while Baillie gradually got better—and less Scotch as the time wore on. He eventually motored back with the two girls and the weedy gardener's son. I think, by the way, that Jones is rather interested in that youth.

Baillie is very close as regards Honesty. Beyond his perturbation, already mentioned, I have learned no whit as to her present whereabouts. I shall have to ask right out, I suppose, when the hour comes for me to take Jock into my grand scheme.

The Undertaker, regretfully, has not been able to quite complete my purchase of Mrs. Dene's house and garden. He speaks (with technical elaborations which I don't positively follow) of mortgages and title deeds, and what not. I am to see him presently——

Which brings me back once more to to-day, with its exhausting catastrophe.

I can't make myself realise that my cherished quartos are really sold—it must surely be some hideous dream from which, with huge relief, I shall suddenly awake. When I arrived at the sale-rooms this afternoon, it was with the fixed intention not to go in, but just to glance, as it were, at the outside. Alas, for the frailty of us poor mortals; good intentions always prelude fatalities. At least, they do with me.

There was quite a crowd in the lobby, with a real policeman keeping order. I paused at the foot of the steps and said to him, "What's the matter, officer?"

"They're selling some very rummy old books, sir," he informed me, adding with fine pity, "and half London seems to have gone cracked over 'em."

"What are they?" I pursued, with a guilty joy surging in my breast.

"I don't rightly know, sir. Won't you step inside?"

I was going to say "No, thank you," when somehow I got pushed up the steps. One could n't stay in the lobby; I had to go in or out.

So I went in.

Such a buzzing and excitement! I spied Joyn-

son at the high rostrum, gazing with admirable affectation of nonchalance over the heads of the crowd of book buyers, bargain-hunters, dealers, and curiosity mongers—at the uppermost shelf of the remotest bookcase. A lot had just been sold; I fought my way to the long table below, Joynson's perch, and found half a seat with a rather fusty old dealer.

Another lot was put up. Joynson's business tones chanted in a minor key; the bidding was impatient, brief. Yet another lot was cried.

I peeped at the catalogue, grimed and already dog-eared, which the old dealer had spread before him. My glance, shooting sideways, lighted upon Lot 206.

My quartos.

I can hear now Joynson's voice, still in the minor key, still affecting indifference. "Lot 206. Eight very finely preserved quarto volumes of Shakespeare's plays. Published in the years 1600-1619. Collected by John Dering, Esquire, and possibly originally bound together. Each half-bound in brown calf. The pages have not been cut down, but the leaves of two volumes are slightly spotted. Imprinted as follows:

"(1) The whole contention between the two Famous Houses, Lancaster and Yorke. With the tragicall ende of the good Duke Humfrey, Richard Duke of Yorke and King Henry the

Sixt. Divided into two parts, and Newly Corrected and Enlarged. Written by William Shakespeare, gent. Printed at London, for T.P. No date.

“(2) A Midsommer Night's dreame. As it hath beene sundry times publikely acted, by the Right Honourable the Lord Chamberlaine his servants. Written by William Shakespeare. Printed by James Roberts, 1600.

“(3) Mr. William Shakespeare, His True Chronicle History of the Life and death of King Lear, and his three daughters. With the unfortunate life of Edgar, sonne and heire to the Earle of Gloucester, and his sullen and assumed humour of Tom o' Bedlam. As it was plaid before the Kings Majesty at White Hall, uppon St. Stephen's night, in Christmas Holidiaies. By his Majesties Servants, playing usually at the Globe on the Banck-side. Printed for Nathaniel Butler, 1608.”

But why go on? Don't I know those dear long-winded old titles by heart! Haven't I pored over them, read them aloud to myself, hugged them (figuratively) to my breast on a thousand happy occasions! And they are gone, gone——

I could weep were it not so utterly childish. And yet——

The sale of these books, beloved as they are,

means the lifelong happiness of two very interesting young people. Now I can buy Honesty's garden comfortably, easily—and give it back to her complete and unencumbered. For she shan't have Baillie with it unless she particularly wants him.

Of course she will.

Joynson's voice, still droning: "The late and much admired Play called Pericles, Prince of Tyre. With the true relation of the whole history, adventures, and fortunes of the said Prince. Written by W. Shakespeare. Printed for T. P. 1619. There is one volume missing, gentlemen, of the series, if compared with the other known sets. Probably the missing volume is the 'Yorkshire Tragedie, not so new as lamentable and true.' That was also printed by T. Pavier. Will some gentleman kindly start the bidding. Five hundred pounds? Thank you."

At once there was a confusion, a babel. Six hundred, seven hundred, eight hundred, eight-fifty. Pause. Nine hundred, nine-fifty, nine seventy-five. Pause. Twelve hundred, at a jump.

Joynson acknowledged the bid with a pale smile. He waved his hammer inquiringly. Twelve-fifty, seventy-five, thirteen-hundred——

Fifteen hundred, in nasal tones.

The old dealer beside me nodded. "That's the American," he told me, knowingly. "He bought a set a week or so back. Most in this lot are different to those he holds. He means business."

"Please don't talk," requested some one behind us. "I want to follow the bidding."

"Now, gentlemen"—cried Joynson, just a shade flurried. "Fifteen hundred has been offered. Any advance?"

My old dealer glanced up. "Sixteen," he mumbled.

This annoyed me, for some absurd reason. Those grimy hands on my quartos? Never. "Sixteen-fifty."

I did n't realise that it was I who had said it. I felt myself go scarlet. Such a breach of etiquette! Trying to run up the bidding, folks would say. I was n't sure that what I had done was not criminal. "If you want it, sir—" began the old dealer in a hoarse whisper.

"Silence, please. Sixteen-fifty, seventy-five, seventeen hundred. Thank you, sir." Joynson threatened with his hammer.

"Eighteen hundred," muttered the old man next me. "I'm bidding for you, sir, one per cent.," he added in a whisper. "That all right?"

Ere I could frame a reply the nasal voice rang out—"Two thousand pounds."

Heavy pause. One might have heard a pin's head drop—let alone the proverbial pin. Then some one coughed. Joynson, with elaborate politeness, turned in that direction. "Did you say two thousand and twenty-five?" he requested.

"And thirty."

It was the old dealer; and I ardently hoped he would get them and pass them all back to me. When I saw those dear books lying there on the table, so helpless, so forlorn, with the ghost of old John Dering near by, anxiously trembling—beseeching the right buyer to buy—my eyes grew misty.

"Thirty-five—forty—forty-five." The bidding was careful, and came from different parts of the room. What would Joynson think if I bought them in? What would it cost me?

My brain refused to work it out. I only knew I wanted them: could n't let them go. My heart was being torn out of my body. I longed to seize them up in one swift armful, and rush forth. They were mine, mine——

Afar off, a scent of roses—Honesty's garden. To make two people happy. To do one really useful thing in one's life. Surely this was a chance for me *not* to be selfish for ever?

Not the way to get rich, my boy. Head before heart, if you please. If you sell these books

you mustn't give away the result. Better buy them in than do that—though it would be a stupid thing to do. Hang sentiment, useless lumber. Let it go.

“Two thousand, one hundred!”

That brought me back to earth. The American meant it: no good to fight. Only three in it now. I bade my old man be silent—avoided his watery glance. I tried to distinguish who were those left in; hoping to be able to read the man and find comfort in thinking he had a nice face.

“And two hundred.” It was the last bid of one of the best-known book dealers in town. He was calm and confident: but so was the American.

“Two thousand and two hundred, gentlemen?”

The Yankee *had* a nice face, if a somewhat decided voice. He added fifty pounds immediately. A small thin man on the other side of the table increased it to seventy-five. I did n't take to the small thin man, any more than did the ghost of old John Dering. I could see him plainly whispering to the American to end the matter. His intangible mind was made up.

“Two thousand and five hundred pounds!”

The pause which followed this stupendous bid was almost painful. Joynson looked positively

green. His hammer wavered: lifted itself: wavered again.

"Gone," said he, in a tiny little croak. The hammer fell with a nervous rap.

I turned to the American even as the hubbub broke out. He was close behind me, promising the ghost all sorts of things. He elbowed his way towards the rostrum; and, as he passed, I laid my hand on his sleeve. "I heartily congratulate you, sir," I said; and I meant it—for the moment!

He looked surprised. "Thank you."

He had a pleasant way of saying it: the ghost and I shook hands.

CHAPTER XIV

NEWS brought me by the Undertaker has rather upset my peace of mind. Until now I have been fondly under the impression that, whatever had been Mrs. Dene's difficulties monetarily, the sale of her property must have dispelled them—for a while at least. But when all the title deeds were before me, and the Undertaker, Mr. Wright, and I concluded the business—with deep misgiving I perceived there had been heavy mortgages on the house and grounds.

And I knew that Wright had n't given much for the furniture.

Since, I have been worried about them, those two bold people who have disappeared from my ken—to adventure, no doubt, some impossible craft on stormy waters. I know the way women think, bless them—even if I am an old bachelor.

You only have to buy a sweet-stuff shop, or a stationer's (with a typewriter), or start a select boarding-house at the seaside. Then—it's merely a question of how long your poor little bit of money will last!

Baillie, however, is in correspondence with them—so it's all right.

The mystery of his story has been solved, in a somewhat exasperating manner. The editor of the *Balmoral* writes me indignantly, enclosing a letter from one of his readers. It seems that the *Balmoral*, like most enterprising journals nowadays, offers prizes. One of them is a reward to any one detecting unoriginal matter in its pages, and some astounding clever fellow has tracked Baillie's effort to its source.

In short, the story has been printed before, and the editor is righteously wrathful. So, too, am I. The story came out first ten years ago, we are told, in a missionary paper circulating in China. Evidently the *Balmoral* is widely read!

The editor had requested Master Know-All to produce the missionary paper before taking the reward. The wretch did so. It has been produced to me. I recollect that I said (to Honesty, was it not?) that I thought I had once read something like the story. I was right, I *had*.

The story is n't Baillie's. It is my own, written and forgotten long ago—save that, as Stevenson once said—my memory remembered for me. This practical joke makes me figure as an idiot in the eyes of the *Balmoral* folk. I don't believe I quite deserved it at Honesty's hands.

I have returned the five pounds, plus the "golden guinea" reward. (Why do editors always think in "golden" guineas or "crisp" five-pound notes?) I have also apologised—explaining that the story *is* original, even if not new—since the anonymous contributor to the missionary magazine and myself are one and the same person.

Why did Honesty do this thing—and how?

Jones did certainly have a comprehensive, exhaustive, and rather late spring-cleaning this year. Did she come across stray numbers of the *Reaper* in this process, and promptly use them for the daily bonfire? Did a copy incontinently blow over the hedge into Honesty's garden?

Even then, the story was anonymous. I turn to the *Reaper*, produced by the villain who has received my guinea, to make sure. Yes, the story was unsigned.

Turning the leaves I notice the inevitable "Answers to Correspondents"; and my own name hits me in both eyes at once. "Mortimer Swift. Thank you for kind wishes and generous gift from your talented pen. The story appears in this number on pages four and five. We should much like to hear often from you."

That's how you get something for nothing; although I don't value the story, anyway. Per-

haps I did value it then, when as a novice I found it so hard to get into print.

Thus it is possible that Honesty obtained the story, per Jones, per her bonfire. I ask Jones about it, and she answers in the correct Jonesian manner. "Reapers! No, I haven't seen no reapers. What are they—them things you trim the grass with? A paper? Oh, no, sir. I don't never destroy any of your writing papers."

Jones always calls manuscript writing-paper; which seems to me a good description. "It was a paper like this," I explain, showing her the copy.

She plainly recognises it, and is taken aback. "Well, there was a lot of rubbidge and stuff under the desk. I did n't think they was any use. You told me that what was under there must have fell out of the waste-paper basket, and could be burnt."

"There were some papers like this?"

"Just one or two, now I call it to mind. And I did n't burn them, in course. The young lady next door always had the old magazines for the Cottage 'Ospital. I expect I gave 'em to Miss Honesty."

"It does n't matter a bit," said I, seeing that it upset her to imagine I thought her over-zealous.

"It's no good leaving 'oles and corners if

you're going to spring clean," says Jones. "You must do it thorough; or else leave it alone."

I mollify her. As she goes forth from my den she hesitates at the door. "I suppose you don't hear nothing of the young lady, sir, and her mar? I do so 'ate that garding being empty-like. They was saying the vicar would have liked the place—for a Cripples' Home, or something—but you was just too quick for him."

"Mr. Baillie hears from Mrs. Dene, I believe," say I, turning over my "writing-paper" as a kind of hint that I wished to be alone. "Who told you about the vicar wanting the property?"

"Mr. Wright's young gentleman—he told me," states Jones. She adds, in so extremely doubtful a tone that I, too, begin to be doubtful—"I don't think Mr. Baillie knows where Mrs. Dene has gone. Miss Honesty would n't ever be writing to him, would she?" As I do not answer, Jones is compelled to retire—which she does lingeringly and with evident regret. She leaves me still a long way off discovering why Honesty typed my story and gave it me as something new. I understand her reason for not accepting the five pounds. But no more.

Baillie is busy in the garden, and the Undertaker is trimming the verges with accuracy and

precision. I determine to go down to them, and roll.

.

It was not until after the Undertaker had gone that I had a chance to open the subject, and even then it was not easy. I said something about the garden, of course.

"It's pleasant work," said Baillie, in answer.

"I didn't mean that so much," I went on. "I meant I oughtn't to let it become a tax on you, Jock. You're so good-natured that you don't realise you're giving up a lot of your time."

"I would sooner be here than in the city."

"Yes; but—are you sure that there are not other things you would like doing better? Weeding a garden is all very well——"

"I've nothing better to do, Swift, than weeding—just now. It will be very restful to the brain."

So I tried another tack. "I'm going to Dieppe, after all—just for a few days. By the way, when do you take your annual month? Or is it six months?"

He considered the matter gravely, straightening himself up from a recalcitrant dandelion which simply would n't come out of the middle of the gravel path. "It will be on Saturday

week that I shall be having a few days' vacation," said he deliberately.

"And where are you going?"

"Just anywhere."

"That means I'm not to ask questions?"

He shook his head. "I was thinking I would cross the water with you, Swift—if you had been willing."

"Would you, Jock? I never gave that a thought. It would n't be bad though, upon my word." I was rather struck with the idea. "Why did n't you mention it before?"

"I might be bothering you," he began.

"Not at all, I should like it immensely." I took a shot at him: "I had an idea that you would be seeing the Denes during your holidays: or else I should have suggested your coming to Dieppe with us."

He made no reply—beyond turning to his weeding. After a long pause, he said: "And what made you think I would be seeing the Denes?"

"Oh, I don't know. I only imagined that might be your programme, from some remarks you once made to me." I eyed him banteringly, but he weeded with obstinacy.

"I often wonder where they are," I added, hinting outrageously.

He still was silent; so I began to roll the lawn

again. When we were tidying up for the night he suddenly remarked, apparently *apropos* of nothing at all—"I will not be knowing where Mrs. Dene has gone. She does not favour me with her confidences."

I was so taken aback that I did not even resent his sarcasm—palpably aimed at myself. It was so firmly in my mind that Baillie knew where they were. "You don't know Mrs. Dene's address?" I questioned blankly.

"Since they left Carbridge I have never seen nor heard from the Denes," says he, then—and I saw that he was bitterly aggrieved.

"You don't imagine that I—" There I stopped, and faced him. The full seriousness of the issue had come upon me. "Surely you know where they are, Jock—you must know! Why, I have been counting on your knowing. All my plans have been laid in that belief. Has n't Honesty written you?"

"Aye, she did that. I have her letter." He began fumbling in his coat pocket. "I will show it to you, Swift, if you wish."

"My dear boy, of course not! Letters like that should be sacred——"

"'Tis only to thank me for sending her a book," said he, gruffly. We went inside and washed our hands, and were at supper before taking the subject further. Baillie presently

produced a small, carefully preserved note. It ran as follows, so far as I can recollect:

“DEAR MR. BAILLIE: How kind of you! I have so long wanted to read *Heart's Desire*, and have never once felt brave enough to ask the author where I could get it. I shall think of you all when reading the story—it looks very interesting from a small peep I have taken. Yes, we are leaving Carbridge almost immediately. I do not know where we shall settle ultimately; but we go to a friend's house first, in Highgate. I shall miss my garden, and my good neighbours, very, very much. It is a wrench for mother—and yours always sincerely,

“HONESTY DENE.”

I read it, and felt flattered in the truest sense. It was nice of Jock to have given her my book. I told him so.

“She was wanting to have it,” he answered, baldly; then volunteered, “I have no had leisure to read it myself, Swift. I suppose there was naething in it she shouldna read?”

He said this in such good faith that one could not be upset. “It is a perfectly proper book,” I announced. “That's partly why it did n't run into a second edition. Jock, is this *all*?”

“Miss Dene will have written that just be-

fore she left Carbridge," said he, labouring to be calm. "She has thought naething else of me worth a letter. I'll trouble you to pass the whiskey, if you please."

I complied in silence. It seemed useless to tell him that I, too, had had no word from them; had not the faintest idea where they might be. Some magnitude of the task I had so lightly undertaken came upon me——

I heard Baillie's voice as from afar: "'Tis not the water-jug I was wanting, Swift."

"I beg pardon, I'm sure." I woke up to my duties as host, while Baillie liberally helped the table-cloth to my famous whiskey in his intense agitation.

CHAPTER XV

It is absolutely hateful to have to confess it, but the Denes have disappeared into the unknown without leaving us the smallest of clues. Neither the Undertaker, nor Baillie, nor my faithful Jones have the least knowledge of them; but all three plainly think that *I* know. I simply dare n't admit, therefore, that my information on this extremely interesting matter is even less than theirs.

To Baillie and the Undertaker I have become the god out of the machine. They obviously wait my pleasure, and artfully attempt to outflank each other in seeking to curry favour. I have to preserve a Sphinx-like attitude, which is both unbecoming to my frank nature, and intensely difficult to maintain. My inquiries have had to be conducted in the manner of a certain eminent detective, now unhappily deceased.

An advertisement in the *Morning Post* suggested itself, and was duly achieved. I worded it carefully, declaring my intentions crypto-

grammatically (Heavens, what a word!) as follows:

“Mrs. D——, of C.-on-M., is asked to forward her address to Mortimer S., who very earnestly wishes to be remembered.”

I keep saying inwardly that something more must be done. That's as far as I get.

Baillie ought to find Honesty, of course. *I* should, quickly enough, if she were in love with me.

In such a contingency I would move heaven and earth. I would search night and day. I would will to find her, and bring her back to her little nest, and cherish her far beyond every other conceivable aspiration or ambition. She would be my life—and more than my life. She would be everything worth having in this wide world—just embodied in the sweetest personality ever created——

I recollect, suddenly, that she is n't in love with me.

Sometimes I fear that Baillie is not pre-eminently worthy of his good fortune. It is uncharitable of me; but Honesty is such a very exceptional girl. I should not have given up my quartos if she had not been a really extraordinarily exceptional girl. Baillie, it seems to me, takes it too easily. He is ready and willing to let me bear the heat and burden of the quest

—only, of course, he does not understand that I am “questing.” Suppose I fail; what is to become of the Home? Obviously I cannot live in two houses; even if I can manage—with the assistance of Jock, the Undertaker, and Jones—two gardens.

Jones, by the way, once hinted that the church people would like the Home as a Play House for Crippled Children. One might have worse neighbours; I will hear what Carbridge has to say on the point.

But why? I am *going* to find Honesty.

I frequent the A.B.C. depots in Typewriting Land, and peer about me inquisitively. So much so that I have to keep changing to a fresh depot every day, for fear of the manageress's eye. I quail before the glance of an A.B.C. manageress. How can I explain to one so haughty and eminent that, please, I'm only searching for Honesty Dene, hoping against hope that she may one day be wandering about here, carrying a rolled and beribboned typescript, trying to get work?

It is my very unlegal aspect which awakens distrust in the rather meagre breast of the manageress. Only barristers and other minions of the law have the freedom of Typewriting Land.

Baillie, as I say, does n't appear utterly heart-broken. He's anxious, and all that. But——

I have fancied (I may be entirely out of it)

that when Eva comes motoring Carbridgewards, Jock is a wee bit inclined to—forget. Certainly, Eva is a most amiable creature, *and* my cousin; still, if I had to choose between Eva and Honesty——

This reminds me that we are all going to Dieppe in a few days' time. Aunt Sophie has arranged it. She arranges everything; and either invited Baillie, or encouraged him to invite himself. Uncle Duveen is not going to Aix unless he thinks he's worse. They are going to try him with a rest-cure at Dieppe.

I laugh, sardonically and silently, at the notion of a rest-cure in that very lively little Normandy seaport!

.

The postman has brought me a letter from Gatherway, enclosing a cheque for dividends much overdue. He gossips about his series, and accuses me of being the slackest editor he has ever had the misfortune to encourage. I am to start on number four of his *Little Marvels* (Little Devils, I am beginning to think them), and see that he has all "copy" by end of September. He does not make the slightest apology for being late with his dividends.

Any spare time I might have from the *Colosseum*, which I am finding to be an interesting

handful, I had intended to employ on a more complete tour of Typewriting Land. I am very worried about that child. What can she be doing?

It is astonishing how much we miss her from that garden. She has, somehow, grown to be part of my rather useless life. My little scheme for her happiness has quite come to a standstill. It shall go forward again, however; we *will* make her happy, in spite of herself.

Why is she silent? Through what deep waters are they passing, those two brave, devoted women? Their very silence terrifies me, because I know a little of the world. I have written Aunt Sophie that I can't go to Dieppe: am far too busy.

.

Baillie, reinforced by Eva and Miss Harrison, has demanded my instant surrender. I am to go to Dieppe, or else have Uncle Duveen's blood upon my head. It is imperatively necessary that I should guide my revered relatives to France.

"It's so easy," I argue, plaintively; "you can't want me. You just go to Newhaven, and change into the boat——"

"Which boat?" demands Baillie. "I will be thinking there are many boats at Newhaven."

"Only one which will take you to Dieppe," I retort. "The obliging officials will see that you do not make any mistake. You will want French money on board, because——"

"And how will we get French money at New-haven?" asks the relentless Jock.

"There is a bureau on the platform."

"But if it's an English boat, why do we need French money?" This from Eva, hopelessly.

"Because there's a way they have of calling a franc a shilling. '*Ern frong*'—pardon my accent—they say, in response to your request, 'How much?' You give them a shilling, if you have no French money; but *do* you get two-pence change—I wonder!"

"You must come with us, Mr. Swift." Miss Harrison states the issue calmly, but emphatically.

Their motor-car is pawing the earth outside my gardens. (Am obliged to write in the plural—since Honesty is yet to seek.) The bilious youth is lost. So is Jones. I am so bothered by them all, and by Miss Harrison's pretty little smile, that I show signs of collapse. At once they rush the trenches, attempt the fortifications.

"We shall never be able to get through the Customs without you," declares Miss Harrison, her glance gently persuasive. "I haven't the faintest notion of French, while as for Eva——"

"I've forgotten every syllable," my cousin affirms.

"French is not necessary at Dieppe," I hasten to reassure them, struggling still, although with a strong sense of impending defeat. "When they ask whether you have any contraband—tobacco, tea, or matches, you know—you simply have to shake your heads, look (if possible) charmingly innocent, and repeat, '*Rien—absolument.*' That's all you say."

"I could n't say it," Eva decides; "at least, not so convincingly as that."

"There will be great confusion at the Customs, I make no doubt," ruminates Baillie gloomily.

"No confusion at all," I tell him, lightly; "and directly you are through you must stand shoulder to shoulder outside the station, until you see the 'bus of your hotel. Signal to the driver, and firmly decline to enter any other vehicle of any sort, kind, or description."

"I am thinking it would be only kind to Mrs. Duveen that you should go with us, Swift," argues the young man, obstinately. "She is your aunt—and it will be your duty."

"What about Honesty's garden?" I demand, out of patience with him. He avoids my stern regard, and mumbles: "It is your ain affair, Swift—that gairden. Mrs. Dene and Miss

Honesty would come back to it awbiles, may be?"

Plainly a question. I am not going to answer it. As a matter of fact, I cannot answer it—satisfactorily.

Miss Harrison is firing again a whole battery of cajolements: "Mrs. Duveen vowed she would take no denial. Eva and I are special ambassadors—ambassadors. We called for Mr. Baillie, and we can't go back with a refusal. Now, please—I wish you to come; Eva wants you; Mr. Duveen won't go without you—and if Mr. Duveen won't go, we none of us can go. Think of that."

"The dad is trying to wriggle out of it, that's a fact," Eva protests. "He always does try to wriggle out of everything jolly. In common with most men, my respected father is frightfully changeable. Directly we're set fair *he* becomes stormy."

"My dear girl, I'm not changeable."

"You're the most changeable man in the world, Mortimer. You said you were going to Dieppe, and now, when you have coaxed us into thinking of accompanying you—you meanly try to get out of it."

I coaxed them into going!

Jones and the bilious gardener's son being still lost to sight, though to memory dear—and

the motor-car being on the point of blowing Carbridge and all its inhabitants into smithereens, I can but give way. "I'll go for a week-end. From Saturday till Tuesday, just to fix you up comfortably and securely."

"You dear!" cried Eva; and before I could retaliate, she overpoweringly embraced me. I liked it, although convinced that she was peeping for Baillie all the time. Miss Harrison laughed; she always does laugh.

She did n't desire to express her feeling of joy and gratitude quite so openly. She merely squeezed my fingers at parting. At least, I like to believe she did.

CHAPTER XVI

WE are at Dieppe, at the Hôtel du Rhin. It is modest, comfortable, and on the front. It is also scrupulously clean. The cashier speaks English, which is a help. Of course, I intend to return on Tuesday, at the latest.

My Aunt Sophie and my Uncle Duveen have taken a family ticket for the Casino—which is practically opposite—for six. We are therefore *all* Duveens for the time being. This is a most economical arrangement, especially as Uncle Duveen refuses to let any one else pay any part of the amount.

The weather is behaving, and, really, the place is quite delightful. I had forgotten that the country was so pretty. We walked out to Pourville the same afternoon that we arrived, and motored back. Baillie and Eva could not find room in our car, so chose to walk.

At dinner we sat at a long table, preferring this to the restaurant, where one dines *à la carte*. It was all very amusing and lively. Afterwards, I escorted my family (for Uncle Duveen would n't

come out) to the Casino. There was a ball going on, and the everlasting *petits chevaux*.

Dancing is not in my line, but I like to watch it. Eva insisted on my taking her round, and then Miss Harrison. I suppose my dancing was humorous in some manner, for she smiled continuously. At last I remarked, "I'm afraid you would rather sit it out?"

"Would *you*?" she inquired, instantly.

"Well, I'm a bit of a duffer—and I hate to bore any one. Every man should be aware of his limitations."

"No true man is," she retorted.

I had to escort her outside, to discover what this might mean. We walked up and down by the sea for a turn or two, and then came back. Eva and Jock had lost themselves, however, and Aunt Sophie was fixed to table No. 4. "How much?" I asked.

She answered over her ample shoulder, and without removing her fixed stare from the green cloth: "About a louis."

"I shall fetch uncle."

"You can—at eleven o'clock. I have a system, and it's going to be worked until then."

I know those systems. "Shall we leave her to her fate?" I asked Kitty Harrison, not meaning it really.

Aunt replied for her. "By all means—I hate

to have people asking me questions. My system demands perfect concentration. Go and look at the sea, both of you."

"We have," said Miss Harrison, plaintively.

"Go again, and see if an arm sticks out, or anything, holding up the sword Excalibur. I command you, Modred."

"My name is not Modred; and——"

Twenty people said "Hush!" simultaneously.

"We had better go," opined Miss Harrison.

"Dance?" I queried.

"Let us stroll into the town, and have a look round," she suggested, which was a delicate way of telling me I did n't dance at all!

I got her cloak, and we started off for the Café des Tribuneaux. As we crossed the road and passed under the gateway between the two old towers of the château, she took my arm. It was done in such a nice way that really one could n't object.

"That's the theatre," I told her, pretending I had n't noticed; "and that's the Hôtel de Paris, a very jolly little house. I should have taken you all there, if the 'du Rhin' had been full. By the way, where are you sleeping at the 'du Rhin,' you and Eva?"

She seemed surprised, but answered, "At the back, looking on at such a quaint little courtyard! It's the dearest room, with two beds

under canopies; and there are long windows opening to a little verandah."

"Be sure you draw your curtains close," I said, in a fatherly way; "it's rather difficult to make them meet, and there are other rooms all round that court-yard. I remember one time I was here— Ah, here's the Tribuneaux," I exclaimed, pointing it out. "It's a capital little café—and very Bohemian. In the days of the Yellow Book this used to be a merry meeting house."

We found comfortable seats; two chairs on the pavement, in a corner not too near the orchestra. We were just under the awning and out of the draught. "Now, what will you have?" I questioned.

"Isn't this all delightfully irregular?" remarked my companion, settling herself. "Here we are, all by ourselves——"

"I'm old enough to be your grandfather! Besides, this is France; and—here is the garçon! What is it to be?"

She really did n't know. "Coffee? Cassis et siphon? Grenadine? A tiny nip of Kirsch?"

"Coffee, of course. I did n't know one could have coffee here—" I gave the necessary orders, and subscribed to the orchestra. Mademoiselle had espied us, and was soon attending—with outstretched escallop shell.

"You were going to tell me," began Miss Harrison, so soon as the coffee had appeared, "something about our court-yard. I expect I ought not to hear it, and that makes me all the more curious."

"It was nothing," I told her, soothingly. "It left off at the interesting part. I forget now. Is n't it jolly being here?"

"I think it's very nice," she said, dutifully. "But I expect you miss the garden."

I wish she had n't said that. It reminded me of something I have been trying to forget: something I don't admit at all. Just a kind of little backstairs thought. "I am a bit worried about that garden," I confessed.

Miss Harrison looked sympathetic. For once, she did n't smile! "I should like to tell somebody all about it," I announced, brazenly. "But Aunt Sophie would say 'Stuff and nonsense' long before I had finished—which would n't help me a bit."

She considered her coffee, and suddenly peeped at me above the rim of her cup—like an advertisement I seem to remember. "No," I said—"I must n't try you—even though you do look grateful and comforting."

She put her cup down, and declared, "I'm not very learned about gardens, I know. But I'm a good listener."

I thought of Jones. What would she say to my telling this girl about our little plot? Certainly Jones is n't in the plot yet. But she will be. And Jones is—Jones!

"The story is far too long and too prosy. Also, we have to fetch Aunt Sophie."

"If you have bought that house," said my companion, quite frankly and directly, "with the idea of establishing Mr. and Mrs. Baillie in it—well, it's very sweet of you and most romantic. Are you quite, quite sure you have found the right Mrs. Baillie?"

I replied at once, equally open with her, "I have carelessly and utterly lost the Mrs. Baillie that was to be."

"Ah, you say 'was to be'!" She beamed triumphantly. "I know the plot of your story, Mr. Swift! You are already doubtful as to who shall be planted—that's rather a slangy expression, but it fits!—in your garden. Let me tell you that you are wise to hesitate. People like to arrange their own gardens, and their own affairs."

"Yes, I know all that," I found myself arguing. "Baillie, of course, is rather pig-headed. He was frightfully in earnest, however; and, as girls naturally don't let one guess their feelings, Honesty *might* have been in love——"

"She probably *is* in love. It's still present

tense with Miss Dene, I hope." Miss Harrison laid her hand on my arm. "Do you know I think you're rather a hasty gardener! Take my advice, a very worldly, selfish person's advice—let your roses grow a little before you begin to train them."

"But you would n't have me not find Honesty? I want to put the child back into her garden, at the least. That's why I sold my quartos—you don't know about that, though. I must find her: she's poor and friendless; and there's her mother, too. God knows what they're doing—while I'm just calmly enjoying myself. You don't suppose I bought that house to keep? What on earth could I do with two houses?"

Thus I found myself telling her all about the Comedy of Love; and how I had planned to give Honesty her garden and the husband she wanted——

"You must find that out first," said Miss Harrison with a tiny, amused sort of laugh. "I should n't attempt to even begin the search for Miss Dene until you are quite sure about *that*. As for Mr. Baillie—well, these young men are very fickle."

The small orchestra was employing itself harmoniously with a selection from Thomas's dainty opera "*Mignon*," and we found considerable

pleasure in listening. I had plenty to think about; and, I daresay, Kitty Harrison had her own castles to build. And who could build under pleasanter circumstances than ours, at that instant? Really, the band was admirable; and the music——

Every one knows how delightful is the music of "Mignon."

A quiet crowd had gathered in the roadway, a crowd of all sorts, but chiefly from the humblest quarters of the town. Old and young of the Deippoïis, rich and poor, representing all grades, all classes, were assembled about the Café des Tribuneaux: those who could afford a modest cup of coffee had seats like ourselves at the little tables, either in the café or out on the *trottoir*. The majority stood, however, in the roadway, in orderly, wonderful silence, their eyes looking towards the music, themselves lost in dreams. A young, tired-looking man, bare-headed, held his cap in nervous fingers, twisting it round and round. I could see there were tears in his dim eyes, and that "Mignon" meant some beautiful memory for him: sad, perhaps—most beautiful things are sad.

Near him, a young girl—a poor seamstress very likely, her hair prettily dressed and her clothes charming, for all they were of commonest material. Extraordinary, the gift that the

French have of making the best of themselves: no Cinderellas in France, no rags and tatters, while one can, at least, find needle and thread. She, also, was under the spell of the music. I fancied, as we sat there, that the vision conjured up by those two was visible to me. A cloudy picture, a cornfield through which there was a path, very straight, and very narrow; a little stile over which one entered into the verdant meadow beyond. Here were cattle grazing peacefully: the faint tinkle of bells came with a sense of the gentle perfume of the fields. A thin line of smoke rose upwards towards the summer sky from the chimney of a farmhouse, a girl was feeding some fowls near the rickety, half-hinged gate; the bright colour of her dress vivified the picture. Her eyes were blue and steady; her voice, as she chattered to the clucking hens, was very sweet.

I saw a man coming along the road towards the farmhouse: he paused as he spied the girl. But she knew he was there, she turned, started; a quick gleam of hope illumined her face as she moved at once to meet him. He, smiling tenderly, shook his head. Not yet; it could not be yet. Probation still. Dear God, how endless it all seems: how intolerably patient we must all be—whilst wishing our lives away. Oh, that it were to-morrow! cries the child; and, after him, the

lover—and then, the man. And it *is* always to-morrow: never, never to-day!

I saw that one nervous hand had released the cap; that now the pair stood closer. Her fingers had found his; had imprisoned them. Then the music ceased. Mignon was gone.

It was time, too, for us to go. I was glad to have Miss Kitty's hand on my arm—and her silence. The night was very lovely; the stars were twinkling down at this old earth, inquisitive as ever. As we neared the Casino we found that the moon was above the sea, a trembling enchanted road had been cast by it across the water, broadening and glistening towards us from the far-off silver distance.

Aunt Sophie was still at her system, and doing well, notwithstanding it. Soon as we returned to the Casino, she gave us peremptory orders not to interrupt, but to try hard to be good! So we watched, over her shoulders, the faces of the other players. Some were rather bored, some rather flushed, some a wee bit disconsolate. All conditions were at the tables now; young and old, pretty and plain—the world and the half-world.

I suppose I must have exclaimed very audibly, a little later, for the croupier said reprovingly, "Ush! Talking ees not pairmit"; while Aunt Sophie supplemented this, in her "*italiccy*"

way: "Gracious, Mortimer, I wish you would n't! How can I make up my mind what to do whilst you are breathing so frightfully down my back!"

"It's Gatherway," I hurriedly explained. "Just fancy. I'm sorry, aunt; but it took my breath away."

"It did n't," snapped my aunt. "Don't labour under that misapprehension, I beg of you."

I called Gatherway's attention to the three of us, much to the croupier's indignation. However, we managed to pacify him, and Gatherway was duly presented when he came round to us. He was affable in the extreme, and stated his firm conviction that I was a "gay dog." "Swift's supposed to be exercising his massive brain on my behalf, Mrs. Duveen," he declared, in his great big voice. "It's lucky my business instinct prompts me to pay him by the piece! These editors, they're all alike!"

"Editors need holidays, as much as publishers," said I, flatly.

"I'm here professionally," he roared, in the best of tempers. "I have been arranging a small matter with Calman Levy, in Paris. More work for you, Swift."

"Not translations," I told him.

He, disregarding me altogether, annexed Miss Harrison, and walked her off to the ballroom,

where dancing had just commenced. I stayed with Aunt Sophie and the *petits chevaux*, until she bade me go away. "You're bringing me bad luck, Mortimer," she complained.

"I shall bring you Uncle Duveen in a few minutes. Do you know that it's past eleven?"

Jock and Eva were dancing, so Miss Kate informed us, when she and Gatherway returned in the midst of my aunt's expostulations that it was n't eleven, or anywhere near eleven. As a result, we all came in for it. "Instantly go away, everybody," commanded my aunt, as one of her treasured five-franc pieces was clawed ruthlessly off *Impair* by the relentless rake of the croupier. "You are confusing and confounding me, and I can't sustain it. Kitty, take both those men, and dance with them in turn until ten minutes to twelve. Now I'm going to back *Impair* again. Yes, I will—it's my system." The horses spun round and round briskly. "You'll see, Mortimer, it'll be seven or nine—or possibly three—that's the white one with the chocolate sleeves—" The small animals suddenly, and without sufficient reason, became tired and languid; the brown horse first, then the mottled one that only had such a very small circle to negotiate. "Number nine's done," said my aunt, easily, "but so's number four. An odd number will win, for certain."

We watched anxiously, as numbers three and one came to a dead stop. Then number six—number seven. The croupier got his rake ready.

"Two's going to win," chuckled Gatherway; and the eyes of everybody flashed briefly and angrily in our direction. "It's a hundred to one—no, it'll be eight. Or five."

Aunt Sophie declared positively that five should and must win. It crawled slowly up to number eight, forged past, neared number two, who was betraying considerable fatigue. Nearer yet——

"Come on, five," said Aunt Sophie, encouragingly. Five came on—and won. "There you are, Mortimer," said my aunt, rapturously. "That only shows. Now, all three of you run away, and find those other children. I'm going to follow the bank's luck. Five always comes up twice."

CHAPTER XVII

THE faithful and conscientious Jones has re-directed my last two days' letters from the Haven. Consequently I had a budget beside my plate at *déjeuner* this morning, with an alarming bill for three francs odd for excess postage. I nearly decided to get back home at once, before Jones should quite ruin me.

My mind was fully made up when I went through the correspondence. Half of it took the form of circulars from coal merchants, second-hand book-sellers—I mean, of course, sellers of second-hand books—and dealers in lines of sound old tawny port. Messrs. Rookem and Swindles having just purchased, etc., etc., can offer a really high-class wine at a nominal figure. One bottle extra free with every order for half-dozen.

I wonder whether a repeat order is ever placed with Messrs. Rookem?

That enterprising firm did not make up my mind, however. It was a curious little letter which changed all my plans, a reply to my adver-

tisement in the *Morning Post*, the cryptographic one. I imagine that a child has written the note; its oddly formal style seems to show that the child has had help. Here it is *in extenso*:

“117, Paradise Street, Clapham, S. W.

“Mrs. Jolliman presents her compliments to Mr. Mortimer S., whose advertisement in the papers she wishes to answer. Mother says she had lodgers who seems to be the ones you want. We got your address from a letter which had not been quite burnt up under the grate when we were clearing out their rooms. Mrs. J. only saw your respected advert. to-day in a paper round a parcel.

“Yours truly,

“MRS. JOLLIMAN.

“P.S.—If there is any reward mother thinks she ought to get it.”

The last touch is particularly happy.

I think it good enough to follow this clue, slender though it be. I must n't be staying here too long. I told Aunt Sophie I could not promise more than to bring her and the rest to a safe anchorage: having done this—and Gatherway being conveniently on hand—I propose, gently but firmly, to return to Carbridge.

Of course, exclamations and expostulations. Jock has arranged to take us all to Rouen; there is a Grand Bal on Thursday at the Casino; Gatherway intends to stay till Saturday, and we can cross over together; Aunt Sophie thinks it *most mean*: uncle feels that he *might* want to try the baths at Aix.

I meet these objections seriatim.

Jock can still take the party to Rouen—one can't very well miss the way—one simply gets into a train at Dieppe town station, and one gets out at Rouen. Then, with guide-book in hand, one simply goes to all the churches and the cathedral, and dines at the Soleil d' Or, or elsewhere.

As for the Grand Bal—Miss Harrison can speak for my being no dancer. (Protestations from a pretty little mouth Spartanly ignored.)

Gatherway, I am rejoiced to hear, will stay until Saturday. He will make an excellent cicerone, knowing Normandy by heart. (Yes, you do—don't contradict!)

Aunt Sophie can't mean that I'm mean; I know her too well to imagine, for a moment, that she would wish me to neglect business. (Are you *sure* it's business, Mortimer?) As for uncle, I'll promise to come back, if he should finally decide to go on to Aix——

Eva and Kitty implore. Jock drops into

Scotch—literally, not figuratively. Gatherway sweeps us all up in his “not another word” style, and forbids me to leave Dieppe before the end of the week. We therefore go over the whole ground again, and finally compromise. I am to leave by to-morrow’s mid-day boat, since I am so perverse. In the meantime, I am to take every one this afternoon to Arques la Bataille, and explain who was killed there, and why: giving at the same time a full and historic account of the battle—and the meaning of the motto over the château gate.

I find that there are many other things I have to explain. Why has the coachman so many buttons on his clothes? Do all the buttons have corresponding button-holes? Did Lord Salisbury ever live at Arques—or was it only Dumas? When are we going to see the *Manoir d’Ango*, which Lord Salisbury built? If he did n’t build it, who did?

So *that* was how Dumas came to write *The Three Musketeers*? Oh, *Monte Cristo*, then. Are all his stories true? And what’s the meaning of Phare d’Ailly, and how do you pronounce it? Far di yay? How funny!—and does it positively mean lighthouse? Is it a fact that there are n’t any birds in France? Can anybody go through the Forest of Arques, and are the wild boars very ferocious?

The last question comes from Aunt Sophie, naturally. The others are mostly Eva's. Uncle wants to know what the Dieppe links are like, and whether it isn't confoundedly blowy up there on the cliffs. How many Haskells did I lose last time I went round? Is it a full course, or only nine? What did I go round in?

Miss Harrison is interested in the people who live in the cliffs towards Puy. What kind of people are they? Just poor folk? She understood they were charcoal burners—why, she couldn't say; but don't they have charcoal burners in France?

They do, says Gatherway, when they want to go *out* of France. It is cheaper than pistols, and neater than drowning yourself in the Seine. And one looks much nicer when in the Morgue——

Horrid, everybody declares—and Gatherway sweeps us all up promptly. To tea, where Lord Salisbury once bought a pear, or something. Here I had to describe and expound all that we had seen at the Château of Arques, and why it was called “la Bataille.”

The buttons of the coachman of our *char-à-banc* again came up for criticism on the homeward journey—until he drew rein at the Hôtel du Clos Normand, at Martin Eglise. Great delight here of one and all, increasing to enthusi-

asm. Certainly a most charming spot; quite the most beautiful little place in all the beautiful country round about Dieppe. We had "galettes," and various "syrops"—tinctured by soda-water. "Tea for me," says Aunt Sophie, "even though they *do* charge for it. Undoubtedly, Mortimer, the tea is excellent. China? Of course—as if I did n't know that. You will be teaching your grandmother next."

Uncle asks, are there links at Martin Eglise? Am I sure there are not? He would sooner stay here than at Dieppe. Will I ask the landlord if he may come again and fish the brook? "Yes, but certainly," says the smiling proprietor of the Clos Normand—"Monsieur shall fish all the hours of day and of the night." Uncle states that the hours of day will be good enough for him.

We disembark at the Café Suisse, and get home just in time to jump into our clothes for dinner. Afterwards to the theatre, where Jeanne Petit is delighting the Dieppois on alternate nights with "Madame Angôt," and the "Little Michus." Quite different the little Michus at Dieppe! The General des Ifs a man of humour, yes—but not a clown. He is vehement, and he sings with many gesticulations; the little ladies also vehement: charming, and somewhat French now and then.

During the entr'acte we swarm with all and sundry to the Casino, where the little horses, equally with the little Michus, are charming—and French! Aunt Sophie persists in her system, which appears to me to consist chiefly in punting backwards and forwards on Pair and Impair, with an occasional flutter on number five. However, she wins a louis in the end of it, and, thus fortified, we all swarm back again to the theatre.

I say all; but Miss Harrison has been apparently “swept up” by Gatherway, and the blackness of the night. It is blowing great guns across the Plage; a stinging, inspiriting, devil-may-care wind is roaring and blustering all the way from Paris, to see what the Channel and England are doing. It looks well for my crossing to-morrow.

I was dispatched to find Gatherway, so soon as the little Michus had been finally sorted, and the rightful Irene des Ifs restored, by a pretty device, to her lawful and awful papa. Truly the wind was tonic. I felt really a quite young man when battling with it along the Plage. It pounced at every corner; shouted and laughed and frisked; plunged headlong into the sea; bounded out again, flapped the loose papers on the hoardings, whistled down the chimneys, impudently whisked off hats, and agitated petti-

coats. Never was so audacious a wind. "Off—off!" I seemed to hear. "Come on—what are you waiting for? *Allons vite!* Don't you wish you were me? Because I shall be there first, my boy. Off, off! What a life! What a night! Look up there at the stars twinkling. They know,—they see out of their great big golden eyes. Come along, lazy. Don't wait, don't wait—I'm on the track—I'm going faster than thought to—Her! Do you understand that, my poor old young man? I make my plans as I go, rushing and roaring under the stars—I don't care how wide they open their big golden eyes! Off—off! I don't wait, and wonder—and worry. I—do!"

I heard laughter in the wind as it fled; laughter that stung me somehow. It left a taste of tears in the air; or was it only the salt spray?

Gatherway seemed highly delighted with himself when at last I found him. Kitty Harrison was practically tucked under his arm; her face was in a glow. "What a night, eh? What a wind!" He laughed, too, and then Miss Kate—"We went as far as the pier; but when we tried to come back——"

"I know, but will Aunt Sophie believe it?" I offered my left arm, and thus she had an arm of each of us. "Now then, all together! They

have gone to the Tribuneaux for *café marmitte* and liqueurs; I am to bring you both to confession."

"What a night!" shouts Gatherway again.

"The wind told me that long ago," I cried back to him. "The wind told me ever so many secrets."

Miss Harrison peeped at me. "Really?"

I ventured to squeeze the small hand holding my arm—affirmatively.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE crossing was no joke, though. I came back in the *Tamese*, a beastly little boat, which I sincerely hope has become firewood a long time since. I was not ill; but I did n't feel well.

To-day I called on Mrs. Jolliman. Paradise Street is not anywhere near Paradise, I must imagine. Possibly it leads to Paradise, as the way is long and narrow, and difficult. But I would n't like to promise it. No. 117 was as much like No. 116 as No. 116 was like the rest of the houses. There is a flashy public-house at the end of Paradise Street, but I don't think it is intended as a symbol. Also, a little way down on the left-hand side, where the roadway briefly widens to permit the passage of traffic, there are five stunted poplar trees, "all in a row," as the song declares. Thereafter the street dwindles and diminishes, and becomes, if possible, even more offensively unlike its name.

No. 117 was especially difficult to pick out, by reason of some caprice of the authorities, through which half of the houses have been re-

numbered as part of the Prince of Wales's rents. I perseveringly blundered along until I reached Paradise Alley, then I captured a small pig-tailed child carrying a can, and apparently *en route* for the Prince of Wales's public-house. "Which is Mrs. Jolliman's?" I asked, careful not to frighten my young lady with figures.

"Down by those trees you've come past it you have," she answered all in a breath. She swiftly moved the beer-can to the "off" side. I said, "Down by the trees, eh? Which house is it?"

"The middle one opposite the trees what's got the swing between 'em ever so far down."

I thanked her, and commenced to retrace my steps. The young person eyed my back thoughtfully—I could feel that she did. She gave two hops and a skip, and, swinging the empty can, caught me up. "Mother's doing dressmaking out so it's no use your calling until she comes in."

"Are you Miss Jolliman?" I ventured.

"Euphemia Felicia Jubilee Jolliman that's me." She again deemed it wise to keep the beer-can out of my reach.

"Then you can tell me all about your lodgers, I suppose," I was beginning, when she cut me very short with, "Father says never answer no questions nor don't ask 'em but keep your teeth

close together and you won't never give yourself away."

"Excellent advice in the ordinary course, Euphemia."

"Billy they calls me short for Jubilee see and it is n't such a mouthful."

"I do see, Billy, and strongly approve your father's sentiments. But I have come a long way——"

"They always say that," interrupted Billy, whisking her pig-tail over her left shoulder with the queerest little jerk of her head. "You had best begin right at the beginning and say who you are because I may have got a message for you." I had a momentary gleam of a small black bow at the end of the small pig-tail, ere the latter was whisked into position once more.

"I'm Mr. Mortimer S., if you please."

She flashed me the shrewdest glance imaginable. "What paper was it in?"

"*Morning Post*; at the top of the second column on the front page."

"What was the words?"

"'Mrs. D. of C.-on-M. is asked to write——'"

"Wrong! Forward her address what's the rest?"

"Forward her address to Mortimer S., who very sincerely wishes to be remembered."

"It was 'earnestly wishes' because I reckoned it was a boy's name."

"A boy's name?"

"Ernest of course." We had reached the five poplar trees by this.

"That's my swing but I'm too old for it now." The pig-tail briefly and disdainfully flashed to the front. "I let the kids have it. Oo yes, swinging's low."

You have become used to my small guide's "comma-less" method of speech by this, so that I need not make any further attempt to indicate it. We paused before No. 117—I understood that it must be No. 117, although nothing very clearly demonstrated whether it was any number at all.

"I should n't have thought swinging was very low," I argued.

"You better come in and wait," she condescended. She hung the beer-can on the railings of the gate, and announced over her shoulder, "That's for the milk. I went to fetch it, but of course he was out."

"The milkman?"

She nodded. "I just got there too late, and missus would n't put it in the book. I don't like her—she's no class."

Billy opened the door with a large key, discovered under a dilapidated boot-scraper. She

entered the gloom of a narrow passage, papered years ago in imitation of marble slabs. Nowadays, the marble had visibly whitened, with age or damp, in great fantastic patches. A straight and steep flight of linoleumed stairs led us to the "front and back"—a sitting- and a bed-room which Mrs. Jolliman was accustomed to let "with cruet, candles, and attendance"—if asked for.

"But some likes to do their own, and then it's eighteenpence a week cheaper," Billy instructed me. "*They* did their own after the first fortnight."

"Your late lodgers?" I asked, surveying the poor, shabby little apartment.

"Mrs. and Miss D.," replied Billy, eyeing me thoughtfully. "This was their living-room, you know." She made a direct attack upon the subject uppermost in her mind. "If there's any reward, you had best give it to mother, on the quiet like. Father, he"—she hesitated—"father don't care to be bothered with business."

I told her that I would be careful not to bother father with business; at which Billy seemed relieved. "Father's had a lot of worry, you know; and he gets awful bad headaches sometimes."

She jerked her pig-tail to the front, then to the rear, then eyed me with her head on one

side, like a sharp little bird. "I found the letter what gave us your address. It was a envelope, at least; and nigh burnt up. Mother could n't read it, but I did. I soon found it out."

"There was no letter inside the envelope?"

"Nothing much. Perhaps miss was going to write to you, and then altered her mind."

"Wait a moment, Billy. Wouldn't it be as well for us to find out whether my advertisement was really meant for your mother's lodgers? There might be some mistake."

"There could n't be," flashed the pig-tail immediately. "That envelope was directed to you, was n't it? And you're Mr. Mortimer S., are n't you?"

I admitted that there could be no doubt; although very desirous that there should be. I had already pictured things—that giving up of "cruet, candles, and attendance" after the first fortnight, was eloquent. I asked the obvious question, "Do you know where Mrs. Dene and her daughter have gone?"

Billy screwed up her eyes in profound inward deliberation. She unscrewed them cheerfully, after a moment's thought. "I could find out," she decided.

"Then you don't actually know?" My spirits, already depressed by the five poplar trees with-

out and the marble paper within No. 117, Paradise Street, sank more and more.

"I'm certain I could find out," Billy declared. "I seen where they sent their boxes."

I guessed that the little wretch knew more than she chose to tell. Evidently she was keeping her father's advice well in her mind. There was no other way out of it. "Here, Billy, is a silver penny for yourself. I am much obliged to you for entertaining me so long. Tell your mother I will write to her to-night."

She hopped over to me for her half-crown, took it with well-concealed indifference. "Thanks, I'm much obliged to you." She used my own words, feeling that the situation demanded them. As I turned to go, Billy volunteered a further item, one that instantly gave me "furiously to think."

"Funny thing, you know, Miss D. should n't have seen your advert.," said she, lightly. "The paper was ropped round a parcel she left here herself, for mother—round some clothes she gave mother as a present, because—" Billy suddenly recollected her father again. "As a present, you know," she concluded abruptly.

At once I saw it all. Honesty *had* seen my advertisement; had intended a reply.

"You're sure there was no letter in the envelope?"

Billy stiffened. "I'm not in the habit of telling untruths." Her wispy pig-tail bristled with indignation.

"No, no, of course, I did n't mean it that way. I meant might n't there have been part of a letter under the grate—as well as the envelope? Did you look?"

"There was just some little bits of a letter. Mother's got them. But there is n't anything you can make out." Billy was very uneasy so soon as she had spoken. She clearly imagined that now she was "giving herself away." She bustled past me down the stairs; a plain hint. I made another attempt to win her.

"Billy, listen to me. I want you to understand that I'm terribly anxious to help Mrs. and Miss Dene. They're very dear friends of mine. I'm afraid they're in trouble, Billy, and I know they are too proud to let any one guess. I'm not here wanting to ask you a lot of idle questions. Won't you help me to help them?"

She paused at the street-door, looked back cautiously at me. "You are n't Hire Purchase?"

I did n't grasp her meaning until she added, "Nor a Promissory Note?"

"No—most certainly and emphatically. Just a friend, Billy, who did n't understand—until it was too late. A very stupid friend, you'll say."

She nodded in full agreement, then stood with her back to the door, with her head tightly rammed against the panels, until she bethought her of the pig-tail. "Something to Her Advantage? Is that what you are, straight?"

"I hope so. Indeed I hope so."

She hopped back to me. "What did you turn 'em out for, then?" she requested, sharply. "What did you buy 'em up for? Why did you go and take all the things she cared for?"

Before the appalling suddenness and fierceness of this attack I gave way. I did n't show to advantage; I was wordless.

"Took her garden, too, you did. Oo—did n't I see her crying about it? I don't want your old half-crown." She thrust it into my hand. "I don't want it; I wouldn't touch it. It's no good your being sorry. You done it now. Too late! I should think it was too late." Her anger grew, and her eyes flashed lightning. "'Earnestly wishes to be remembered'! As if people would forget, after all you done to them! She don't forget: you need n't worry about that."

"Billy——"

"Don't you Billy me! I hate you, hate you! You with a house of your own, too. *And* a garden." She was back to the door, and tore it open. "That's my garden, and I don't drive people out of it."

"Until to-day, Billy," I told her quietly. Her flame of wrath died down as hastily as it had risen, leaving her pale and trembling.

"You are being as unkind to me as you think I have been unkind to—" A cruel suspicion stabbed me. "Did Honesty tell you all this? Did she think it?"

"She never said anything, of course. Why should she? She never thinks only good of every one, no matter what they does. She's the nicest, kindest, truest, best person in the whole world; and—and—" Billy was quite comma-less once more, while signs were showing that the storm would end as storms generally do. "And she's gone!" suddenly and loudly wailed the poor little pig-tail, breaking down. "She's gug-gug-gone——"

CHAPTER XIX

I WENT away from No. 117, Paradise Street, after comforting the child to the best of my clumsy ability. I went humbly, I hope, understanding that even in Paradise Street one could be sure of finding the most beautiful story in the world. The only story, I dare to suppose.

Truly, Honesty diffuses love and kindness always, like the sweetbriar in her garden, which scents the air in summer, and offers red haws for the hungry birds in winter time. Prickly, too, that she may be, very properly, a little feared as well! I felt myself scratched and chafed with the knowledge that Honesty had thought, even briefly, all those bad things of me—that I should covet her home and garden, and be ready to snatch them away at first chance. I wonder how she came to hear; how she came to so mightily misjudge me. I am hurt to feel that Honesty could think me so mean, so small, so contemptible. I am more than hurt that she could n't even bring herself to write to me.

Prickles; undoubtedly prickles. One can be scratched badly by sweetbriar, for all its sweetness.

Mrs. Jolliman has communicated further, under the hand and seal (an accidental thumb-mark) of Miss Billy. Mrs. J. regrets that she was absent from home when I called, and hopes no offence. She quite understands there is no reward; but all the same, would like to be of service, for the young lady's sake. Hoping to have a favourable reply, Yours truly, Mrs. Jolliman.

The remark about the reward was evidently inspired by Billy. I have not yet quite made friends with the pig-tail. I am still under observation.

I answered Mrs. Jolliman from the *Colosseum*, and stated my intention of calling upon her again at some time more convenient to her, if she would kindly make an appointment. Her reply came per special messenger, Miss Pig-tail herself. She was duly announced by the inquiry clerk, in tones indicating a modicum of surprise, justified to some extent. For Miss Billy had come forth from Paradise Street in full war-paint.

Not that the pig-tail had been looped up, or captured in a net, or fluffed out into a moppy kind of cushion for her hat to flop upon. The

pig-tail remained in all its chaste severity of outline, possibly braided a shade or so more tightly. But the costume surrounding and hemming in Miss Billy was immense, in every sense of the word. Most striking was the blue serge jacket, somehow vaguely familiar. Much too long in the body, too large in the chest, and too small in the waist. It was buttoned where it would, not otherwise. Below this, a singular green skirt, all flounced in the wrong places seemingly, and caught up by a string arrangement, simple, efficient—but not precisely elegant. Below this (at intervals) a scarlet petticoat sagging in between two rather broomsticky, darned-stockinged legs. More darns than stocking in parts; and made especially noticeable by the fact that the legs ended in two left-footed boots, considerably too large. She had black cotton gloves, and carried a corpulent umbrella; her hat was of a mushroomy character, indefinite, but possibly originally a triumph of the millinery art. It was certainly overpowering.

She favoured me with a particularly ferrety glance, and began, as usual, entirely without punctuation—"Mother's compliments and she thought I had better come up and explain that she has n't got much time to see any one except of an evening and father's

at home evenings this week and mustn't be worried."

"That's all right, Billy. I daresay you and I can come to terms. Won't you sit down?"

"I can't stay long because I'm away from school and ought to go this afternoon to make up."

"Don't you always go in the afternoon?"

"I'm a half timer, I am. Directly I'm up to the sixth standard I need n't go any more. Not unless I like."

"Oh, well, perhaps they will let you off this afternoon, if I write an excuse."

"Are you a County Council?"

"Not entirely; but still I may be able to work it for you. Take off your hat and gloves, and we'll have some lunch whilst we talk." I rang for my clerk, and gave him instructions. He said he fully understood, sir, and would see that the manageress understood also.

Billy was impressed that this resplendent young man should have called me "sir"; and I began to score a little. She settled down in a big desk-chair on the opposite side of my table. "Is this where you do newspapers?" she asked, awe-struck.

"Sort of newspapers—" I began.

"What sort of newspapers?"

"Once-a-week papers. All about literature—

that's books; painting—that's pictures; music and belles-lettres—that's French."

Billy's keen glances searched my editorial den. "That's a typewriter, is n't it? And that's a copying press. Father does them at his office, sometimes. He's in the post-office, he is."

She closed her lips tightly together, suddenly perceiving that this might come under the heading of "Giving Herself Away." "He's not a postman, of course," she added, with fine emphasis.

"In the General Post-office, eh? That's a grand big building, not very far from here."

"I been there," she remarked briefly, then fell to critically regarding her two left-footed boots, to signify that discussion on these lines had gone far enough. She dived her hand presently into an impossible pocket under her skirt, involving an alarming display of the scarlet petticoat. "I got the bits of that letter," she announced, producing a crumpled envelope, and laying it on the table; "and mother said I was n't to forget to tell you Mrs. D. had been very ill."

I inquired, hastily and anxiously, when? "All the time," said Billy; "at least, most all the time. Kind of a weak sort of illness; nothing much only it kep her in bed. They did n't have the doctor, not once."

This to cheer me, and to make light of the

matter. Billy pushed the crumpled envelope towards me, and watched narrowly as I opened it and drew forth a few charred pieces of paper. She came round to my side of the desk to help me arrange them. "There's only a tiny scrap here and there that fits in," she explained, deftly sorting the pieces. "I can make out a little of it, see? 'Dear Mr. Swift,' that's the beginning. 'Mother wishes me to—' The rest of that line's gone. 'She would so much like—' that's plain, is n't it?"

"What's this? 'Please let me pay—' I don't understand that at all."

Billy grimly responded, "Don't you? 'Are you certain sure?' Her mind was still running on hire purchase and promissory notes. How could I convince Billy that, instead, I am positively "Something to Her Advantage?" I pored over the fragments of Honesty's letter, pondering the best way out of it.

"Here's another sentence. Look; it fits in after 'pay.'" I showed it to her triumphantly. "Now read, Billy." I held the pieces down firmly, as they were showing a tendency to flutter all over the place. Some one had opened the outer door. My small companion slowly read aloud, "Please let me pay you in my own way, by simply thanking you."

"Well now, Billy?"

The clerk came in with our lunch, and soon we were busy enough with more material matters. During the meal I told Billy all about the queer old genie who wanted just to clap his hands and make everybody happy. The story was a great success.

She understood it, too—did this small fantastic person. In short, I was accepted as a Something to Every One's Advantage, ere the lunch was cleared away. Things had been gradually working in this excellent direction from the moment she heard my clerk call me "sir." "And now, Billy, you see that there's only one thing to be done. It won't be difficult if we both give our minds to it. We must clap our hands, and find Mrs. and Miss D."

She likes me to refer to the Denes in this way. It breathes an air of mystery, and thus appeals to her odd, inquisitive, romantic nature. I discovered that Billy had n't really more than the faintest notion as to Honesty's hiding-place. She simply knows the name of the station wherefrom their boxes have been dispatched.

However, the charred pieces of Honesty's unfinished note gave us, at length, a clue. There seemed to have been some sort of address mentioned in the body of the letter, of which only the town was now existing. Of the town only a suburb—figuratively speaking. We managed to

decipher between us the four suggestive letters C L I F—plainly denoting “Cliff.”

“Ratcliff—where the Highway is,” guessed Billy. “Father he knows Ratcliff because he was born there.”

“I don’t fancy it’s Ratcliff, somehow,” I argued, gently but genially. “There’s a West-cliff, now—near Southend-on-Sea. Let us see if we can find the first part of the word.”

Billy sorted over the flimsy remains. “It must begin with a C, because that’s a capital, plain as anything.”

I was doubtful. “We’ll make it Clif. . . . How about Clifton?”

There was nothing about Clifton finding favour with my honourable and intelligent friend. She did n’t know such a place, and her tone more than hinted that I did n’t either. She leaned to Clifford Street, Kennington, “where the trains go across.”

Her guess set my mind working in a new direction. There must be scores of Clifton and Clifford Streets in London alone, and it may well be only the name of a street, and not a town at all. We decided to leave the matter for the present. “I think I’ll go home with you to Paradise Street, Billy, and take my chance of seeing your mother.” I rang for the clerk, and whispered a few instructions. He

nodded understandingly, being a remarkably handy young man.

"Please come with me, will you?" said he to Billy, confidentially. "We're going to have a look at the shops, sir," he added to me, "while you do your writing. What time shall we come back to tea?"

"Not later than four," I answered, outlining the scheme. "Will you be certain to buy everything for that little girl I mentioned? Billy here will help you choose the things; she's about the same size, is n't she?"

"I should say just exactly the same size, sir. Come along, Billy. You'll help me buy new clothes for Mr. Swift's little girl, won't you?"

"He never told me he had a little girl," remarked Billy, with some return of her distrust. "I don't believe——"

"You come along with me and I'll tell you all about it," said my ever-ready young assistant. "There's a sweetstuff shop close by."

"Is Miss D. your little girl?" requested Billy directly, and totally ignoring the sweetstuff shop.

"Miss D.? Oh, no—oh, dear me, no!" I laughed at the idea, but Billy did not smile. "I don't see why she might n't be your little girl," she declared roundly. She regarded me consideringly. "Is she too old?"

"Ever so much too old," I told her quickly.

"Good gracious me, how old do you think I am?"

"You're much older than father, of course," she was ruthlessly commencing, when my fellow-conspirator came to the rescue. "You just take my hand, and come on," he whispered; "don't you see we're interrupting the gov'nor? I'll tell you about the little girl. There's hundreds of dolls at the shop we're going to. Some of 'em open and shut their eyes, and others can talk. They go 'Peep-eep! mamma! I want you-oo-oo!'"

"They don't," said Billy, flatly.

"You just come and see." His tone was so convincing that she decided she would go. "But if they don't talk, you'll have told a great big whopper," she warned him.

As they were going out of the office I telegraphed "boots." My young man replied in the vernacular, slightly forgetful of our respective positions. "What do *you* think!"

"The gov'nor said *books*," he hastened to explain to Billy. "I'm going to send them in to him. Office work, you know. He's going to do my work while I take you out" (the impudence of it!). "That's a bit of luck for both of us, eh?"

"It's a bit of luck for *you*," observed Billy, pointedly.

CHAPTER XX

FINE feathers assuredly make fine birds. Billy was certainly a remarkably fine bird, fully fledged, when she returned a good two hours later. Also she had been evidently largely enjoying herself. She and my young man were the best of friends. I perceive that the *Colosseum* has a diplomatist of the highest quality in this lad. His salary shall be increased at the next revision; I have marked his name in our books.

As sub-editor I have a fair amount of influence, so I have been pleased to find out. Possibly, it's because I do most of the work——

However, I must record Billy's triumphant re-entry of the offices of the *Colosseum*. She looked taller, and despite the pig-tail, positively pretty. She had chosen a jacket and skirt of dark-blue serge, and had a dark blue spotted sort of blouse, showing where the little jacket was unbuttoned; black stockings, and neat little shoes; kid gloves, if you please—and a round hat of blue felt, with a quill stuck in it.

"I just passed the order over to the manageress of Wallis's," said the tactful organiser of the marvellous transformation. "Complete and entire," I said, "that's the governor's definite ultipomatum. It was all done in a little over an hour; wonderful."

"I am very pleased with you, Carr."

"Thank you, sir. Manageress a friend of mine, in a way, if I may say so." He blushes meaningly. "It's all due to her, sir. Shows taste, I think?"

"Decidedly so." Billy is self-conscious, and betrays the fact by standing alternately first on one foot, then on the other. "Will these clothes suit?" she asks. "The lady made me put them on. There's a new petticoat, too; and there's——"

"They're very nice indeed," I cut in, to prevent further embarrassing revelations. "What do you think of them yourself, Billy?"

"I like them all right, of course, and if the little girl's same size as me and likes things neat and plain and not a lot of frips and frills and high colours and——" She is again devoid of punctuation, and rather breathless. "I says she's a very lucky little girl and I told her so and I told him so and the dolls do talk because I heard them only they did n't do it like he did but much better."

"Told her?" I am puzzling it out when Carr interprets: "The manageress, sir. At Wallis's."

"She said they were all for me but of course that's silly."

"Would you like to have them, Billy?"

I could tell that her small heart leapt. "But they're not for me are they because it would n't be fair and proper to the little girl what you've bought 'em for."

"Well then, they are for you. And you're the little girl in question. It's the reward, you know."

"I don't want any reward." She fidgeted awkwardly. "Where's my own clothes?"

I saw that I had struck a false note. "It's just the queer old genie clapping his hands! You're going to help me find Mrs. and Miss D., aren't you? It may be a long business—although I hope it will be a very quick one—and you must allow the queer old genie to do things in his own way. Your clothes are in that bundle."

"Yes, sir," corroborates Carr.

"So you see? We will have our tea at once—perhaps Mr. Carr will ask for it—and then we'll go home in the tube to Paradise Street, and ask mother what she thinks."

Billy is only half convinced. I see I am rather bungling the business, so leave it alone.

Carr fetches the tea, and has such a flow of conversation whilst he is doing it, that we find ourselves in smooth waters again. Invaluable chap, that young man. He "tips me the wink," as he somewhat vulgarly phrases it. "Make light of them, sir—pretend they've cost hardly anything." I endeavour to follow this advice, but Billy is too shrewd. "It's very kind and I'm not saying it is n't and I am sure I'm very much obliged." She gives a little choke over her tea, and dives deeper into her cup. When she emerges, she adds, "But it ought to have been the milkman, it ought. Not me, because I have n't done anything. Father won't like it; and besides——"

She pauses; and, at thought of her father, becomes the essence of discretion. "Mother would have said the milkman, or the butcher," she concluded, primly. "Because then it's done and can't be got back except in credit. But father he had to put his overcoat——" She checks herself suddenly.

Carr, who has been waiting on her, seemingly understands. "You'll have to sleep in them, Miss Billy—that's the dodge," he says, at which they both chuckle, and I fancy I begin to comprehend. I remember that milkman; Billy would rather I had paid his bill—bless her for a thoughtful little soul!

"Perhaps if the genie clapped his hands again when we get home, you know, other things might happen," I say, cheerfully.

As we were leaving the office she slipped her hand into mine. Her other fingers held her bundle tightly as (I recollect) they had held the beer-can.

"You must promise you won't—be angry—with father," she faltered. "No one's ever angry with him, because he is n't strong and the hours are so awkward."

"I should n't dream of it," I told her. "I hope he won't be angry with me."

She gave small hops and skips to keep pace, and clutched my hand convulsively. "He won't be angry, not him," she remarked with a fine show of courage. "He's never very cross with *me*. He's never cross with any one for long. It's only when his head's bad, that's all."

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I have arranged a plan of campaign, with the assistance of Billy and Billy's mother. Her father, so far as I am concerned, counts for nothing. I am sorry; but I did n't take to him. He might have had one of his headaches, however, and so not have been at his best.

I have contrived to become lodger at Mrs. Jolliman's; that is, I have taken a bed-sitting-

room in Paradise Street, by the month, at a really nominal rent. Mrs. Jolliman is to keep her card in the window, so that her, "apartments" may still seem to be available. For we have an idea that Honesty will give a sign to Paradise Street before long; some clue that will help us to discover which of the many "Cliffs" in the world are giving her and her mother shelter. It's a chance, as likely as unlikely—perhaps more so. At any rate, Jones and I will be on the look-out at Carbridge, be sure: for I am to be a lodger in name only in Paradise Street.

This entering of myself upon the books of Mrs. Jolliman permitted me ground for interviewing the milkman, and also gave me a means of explaining Billy's sudden grandeur. Her mother gracefully accepted my little selfish charities—for all charity is selfish when you are giving just to please yourself, as I invariably do. But Mr. Jolliman, presumably because of the headache already supposed, was distinctly offensive. Not in direct attack—for then I should have dealt with him; but in tone and attitude.

Thus: if people were to be permitted to avail themselves of the prestige and shelter of the Jolliman establishment, they must pay honourably and straightforwardly for same—not by

underhand tricks; nor by attempts to compensate for an extreme privilege by making offerings *in kind* to the children of the said establishment. It positively made him sick, etc., etc.

I may like Jolliman better as I grow older.

So here I am at Carbridge again, with my books and my pipes; my faithful Jones, and her profligate cat. Nothing has changed, except that Keedels is visibly wasting. Late nights are telling on his constitution.

I hear of some wonderful trout, taken by the local anglers; but should like to have had ocular proof that three of them turned the scale at eight pounds. We have n't had a fish weighing over twelve ounces taken in Carbridge waters since I have lived here. And (between ourselves) Carbridge fishermen are much the same as all other anglers.

The garden seems to have become extravagantly overgrown in a night. Is that the way autumn makes it up to us, I wonder—by allowing profusion where even before we had plenty? I don't like to see places (or rooms) too full; and a garden with everything crowding (rather rudely, so far as the perennials are concerned) makes me think of pruning-knives and the like.

I have negotiated, per my Undertaker—who

seems to have been latterly attending to business even more strictly than usual—for a purchase of the lopped branches from some oaks which have been felled in a neighbouring meadow. With these, a few pounds of good French nails, and some patience, I propose erecting rustic work arches and screens for our new roses. I have already put up an arch over my own gate—I mean the Haven, of course—and although it is a wee bit out of the true, the effect (to my mind) is distinctly artistic. Before Christmas I shall have a score or so of new roses from a man at Lyons, who sends them, via Ashford, nicely packed at very remarkably cheap rates. Climbers grafted on high stock (for which I pay a little more) will flourish over my arches and rustic-work screens, and will hide any defects next season. All my friends will say I am a wonderfully clever fellow, whatever they may secretly think.

Jones has not openly expressed any opinion about the rustic arch. She assisted in the “carting” of the wood from the meadow one dusky evening, and has notified me that the stack which I have built in her “yard” interferes considerably with the hanging-out of her washing each Monday. I have promised to get through with the scheme within the next

week, and have arranged with the Undertaker accordingly.

He is naturally all for neatness and precision. He argues that we must have foundations for our uprights. I ask why, when cross-pieces and ties of very "rusticky" pattern will keep all fast together? He also suggests that we had better peel the wood before going any further, so that the arches can be done over with Stockholm tar. I fear Jones would never wait for us; she would take forcible means. One evening I should return home to find my lopped branches had disappeared. "I did n't think you wanted that there wood any more, you was so long using of it."

I have thought of doing some of this rustic business in the garden next door, but wish to ask Baillie's opinion first of all. Which reminds me that I have a letter from him, informing me that Aunt Sophie and Co. are returning next Sunday. Baillie suggests that I might have a week-end at Newhaven, and so be on hand to meet them. I hardly imagine that I could stand Newhaven (although the name of the town is delightful enough) for longer than an hour or two, therefore I shall compromise by going to Brighton on Saturday next, whence I can easily run over to Newhaven at the right time.

I put this proposition to Jones, who remarks,

“ You don’t never seem to be at home now since the house next door has been empty—so it don’t much matter ”—which is an absurd observation, look at it how you will.

CHAPTER XXI

I WANT to write it all down as coherently as possible, so force myself to begin with the record that I reached Brighton yesterday afternoon. It was raining, and the sea and sky were grey and disagreeable; also the south-westerly wind from Normandy had found a way across the Channel. It was a really depressing afternoon, a fitting prologue in a sense——

But this is to anticipate, and bring confusion where I am particularly desirous of being lucid and intelligible. My mind still works in such a chaos of emotions, however, that I can see this chapter of my life will require a lot of editing before it can be allowed to go into my book.

Shortly—I *must* tell it—I have found Honesty. She and the worst part of her pitiful story are mine. For I must let myself think of Honesty in that manner. She is truly my child now.

It is curious that I should have chosen Brighton—or rather that Brighton should have been practically chosen for me—for just this parti-

cular little holiday. And the rain too, which drove me rather dejectedly from one shelter to another along the King's Road, has had something to do with it. I am so unobservant a creature that, otherwise, I might never have spied that piteous little figure, huddled up and asleep out of the wind under the indifferent protection of the shelter on the Madeira Drive. We might have missed each other; and then——

Well, who can say what then? Fate works on consistent lines, I verily believe. The string of circumstances which has brought me to Brighton just now, just at the right and wonderful instant, was woven by clever hands. It happened in quite ordinary-wise that I saw her in wet mackintosh, and tired, so tired—sleeping there against the ivied wall at the back of the shelter. I looked and saw a pale girl sleeping, worn out and abandoned by all good fortune; her hair blown about and her shabby hat awry, the rain still driving in at her in angry fitful gusts, her hands ungloved and looking very cold. So I saw her and felt pity; and then amazement; and then——

It came upon me to catch her up suddenly and very close; to hold her tightly and securely from all unhappiness for ever and ever. To run away with her from all the whole world, so that she might be mine utterly and wholly; so that I

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might alone care for and guard her. A strange, inexplicable feeling is in my heart; and yet is no new thing. It is part of me; always must be that part of me which counts; always has been the better part of me—since I knew Honesty.

Something perhaps of the love which a father feels for his child? The love that my father had for me, when I was a little chap—as helpless as Honesty looked then? Our only excuse for living is that we may love and help others: it is the way to happiness and that even better thing—sweet content.

I came near to her, and paused irresolute, after all. My first impulse had been to catch her to me, as I have said: then it came upon me that she was sleeping, and so must not be disturbed. An odd mixture of thoughts and doubts prevented me from doing what I would have liked.

As I wondered there, she awakened; and, seeing me, gave out a small startled cry. Then somehow knowing me for a friend (for how in that half-light could she really have recognised me?) she seized my coat with her cold fingers and drew me close. I bent down to hear what she was saying, and guessed the whole of the story from one heart-broken word.

“Oh, my dear and my heart! Don’t cry—

don't cry! God does these things, and He knows best."

The very ardent desire in me to be of comfort to her conquered—despite my set phrases. What could one say in face of such bitter trouble? Honesty stood up, and for a moment brave blue eyes met mine: then she rested her head simply against my shoulder—whilst my arm went about that poor little body, shaken by the tempest of sorrow within it.

It had been a forlorn hope for them; this coming to Brighton—the nearest seaside, and the smallest fare. But the blow had been struck when they had left Carbridge; it had been too deadly for the elder woman to survive it long. I heard through Honesty's tears a story of pain bravely borne; of ill-health steadily going from bad to worse; until at last nothing might be done. "If we had not left home this might never have been"; so ran the plaint. "We were so happy there, so happy. Perhaps we were too happy."

I made her walk with me along the Madeira Drive and let her tell me all. Talking did her good; she grew more calm. Little by little I learned the fact that her mother had passed out of Honesty's life only within the week. Brain fever, exhaustion brought on by worry, too acute for that timid, shrinking nature; by fear of

worse things—fear for Honesty, horrible dread of what must happen when the last of their little money was gone—brought on by the humiliation of it all; by the shock to her old-world pride; by semi-starvation—that the most evil day might be kept away, in the far distance.

“And I could do so little! Oh, it is terrible to find out how really useless one is! All my grand plans went tumbling to pieces. I couldn't earn enough by my typewriting to even pay the baker's bill.”

“Surely you might have tried your friends, Honesty. You might have given them a chance of helping you——”

“At the last I would have done anything. But it was only when it was too late that I could bring myself to see it was too late. Besides, we have few friends, and those are poor. And I have scorn of those who beg.”

She drew herself away from me, as if at some inner thought. I remembered Billy's accusation. Is it possible Honesty thinks this, too? I could but say, lamely, I fear, “I wish you had written to *me*. I wanted to help you so badly. Do you know that the old home is waiting for you? That was why I bought it; in the hope that very soon you would come back to it. Won't you come back?”

She glanced quickly up at me through her

tears, so strange a look. "Do you ask me to come back? Do you think I could ever be happy in Carbridge again?" She shook her head. "No, I have a chance at last. Of course it comes now—and not when it might have meant so much more. I can stay here, and shall be able to live. That is all I really want. To be near her—as near as I can be."

I saw the difficulties ahead, but had enough sense to remain silent. We walked along into the maze of small streets about Kemp Town; and presently came to one trying to be more worthy of Brighton—in a rather pretentious way. I saw its name boastfully lettered on the corner house: Over Cliff Gardens. Truly Billy and I might have searched a long while ere finding this solution to our puzzle.

I told Honesty, before we parted, how I had discovered Paradise Street and Billy: seeking to drive away sad thoughts I made the little history quite cheerfully romantic. I insisted on an early meeting for this morning . . . we went together to the cemetery; and, for a few moments, stood hand in hand.

It was not difficult to understand that this last and worst happening had practically ended their resources. But all their bills had been paid. The stubborn pride of the child is dreadful—if it were not so pitiful. No help will she

accept; indeed, she seemed to grow colder every minute, more distant. Last night, when she cried against my heart I thought it would all be so easy; that I would be able to make her understand her troubles were over. There was only a something very small just to be said, or done. It appeared to be almost achieved.

I have racked my brains this day to discover how it is I have been so near to success; and why I have failed. Clearly there needed but one more touch; it appears to me now that I ought to have perceived instinctively the necessary magic. Honesty is drawing away from me. I am losing her again; and this time hopelessly.

Not *that*! She smiled wanly once, I remember, when I spoke of Jock. That's the thing I want, of course! Poor soul. Love alone can help her—and since I can only help through Love I must bring Love to her.

Her scheme—her “chance” she calls it—is to take up the duties of a sort of companion-manageress to a big boarding-house on the front. She has duly accepted the terms offered! a home in exchange for her services. Honesty tells me that the people look kind: they have not asked her to pay anything; indeed, they have promised to make her a little allowance if the season be a good one. Poor child, I think once more;

but dare not suggest Carbridge again. Suddenly, however, daylight comes to me. I ask the address of the boarding-house; it is always useful to know of places of this sort, I explain. Then when Honesty has returned to goodness knows what kind of a meal at the Over Cliff Gardens lodgings, I set forth promptly for the King's Road.

There are ways of helping even stubborn people. It was not long before I had arranged matters with the proprietress, a nice woman with a terribly worried expression. Her light blue eyes were so suggestive of imminent nervous breakdown that I could quite believe her statement that a manageress was needed in the establishment. She spoke quickly in agitated whispers. "Yes, oh, yes. We have many guests. They are really not exacting, of course; but with so many other things——"

Servants were continually popping in and out of the room all through our interview. A dozen times came, "Excuse me one moment. I am so sorry, but this house——" Then a brief consultation with the maid; and rapid instructions, then a return to me, to the subject in hand. "One has to attend to the business so continually. I have never been able to persuade any one else to give their minds to it. But Miss Dene really has the air of being thor-

oughly capable. There will be plenty to do."

"That will help her," I said. "She must have no opportunity to brood. Let her be as busy as she likes, and pray be careful not to let her suspect our little plot. It will merely be necessary for you to say, at the end of the first week, that she has been so useful that you must insist on paying a proper fixed salary."

"It shall all be arranged, Mr. Swift," she interrupted, "just as you wish. I quite understand." She smiled here in a rather odd manner, I thought. "Miss Dene can come in to-night, if she will. As to her dress——"

I suppose I appeared rather blank. "You had better leave that to me," she went on, shrewdly. "Good clothes will be imperative. She is in mourning, isn't she? Mourning is rather expensive."

She pondered the question inwardly, and whilst thinking of clothes her attitude of worry considerably lightened. "This will be the plan," she presently announced. "You must make her an advance, and I will take her to the best shops to-morrow——"

"She would never permit it," I blundered in. "Don't you see——"

"One moment, Mr. Swift. It is perfectly easy. You make Miss Dene an advance. Say

you offer her fifty pounds. She will probably agree to accept twenty as a loan, and I shall tell her at once that there will be a salary, and certain engagement for the season. She can repay you so much a week if she chooses."

"Excellent," I agreed, admiringly. "You think of everything"; and so came away to a quietly satisfactory, if solitary, lunch at my hotel.

Afterwards I went over to Newhaven to meet Aunt Sophie and the rest; but they must wait for another chapter.

CHAPTER XXII

"THE best laid schemes of mice and men"—exemplified once again! My little plot with the boarding-house lady has come to nothing. But first of all, Aunt Sophie.

I met them at Newhaven, and we all had a frantic time of it going through the Customs. They have a system at Newhaven—excellent in theory, diabolical in practice—of arranging all the luggage in streets of numbers about the floor of the Customs House. Then one simply goes to one's "street," stands near one's box, and waits the inspector. That is, after one gets *in*.

The inspector asks you the usual question. You give the usual slightly modified truth. He either is satisfied—or he is n't. In the latter case you are asked for your key, and your box is duly rummaged.

This is the theory: in effect, it is n't quite so simple. Other passengers seem to have the knack of getting that inspector away from the neighbourhood of your box just as he is next door to it. They seem to know him: he is ad-

dressed by his Christian name—he recognises them—and promptly removes himself to their “street.” It is a quarter of an hour at least ere he works back to you; and all the while you are trembling lest another old acquaintance should appear and hail him off elsewhere.

Aunt Sophie chose me to assist in this pandemonium. We were given the keys and left to our fate. When, after half an hour's conflict, we emerged pale but triumphant from the Customs, we found the London train just ready to start.

Gatherway, who really might have helped, positively did nothing—except get Miss Harrison tea and bread-and-butter and do stupid things of that sort. They had all enjoyed a most delightful crossing and there was no need for tea. I told Gatherway so; but he merely swept me up.

Eva complained that the sea had upset her: consequently she annexed Baillie—or tried to. I had to be dealt with, however; and I can be terribly firm on occasion. Eva was not allowed to do it. I bundled Aunt Sophie and uncle into the carriage in which the little minx had calmly settled herself with Jock. I then called him out, on some pretext or another—smoking, I think—and made him travel with me as far as Lewes.

I broke it to him; gently, I hope. Of course the lad was dreadfully concerned to hear of Honesty's great loss. He appeared quite shaken, and full of eagerness to comfort our poor little girl. I tried to think out some means by which I could reasonably get him to Brighton with me. We neither of us wished to let the others into the business; it seemed not to be absolutely necessary.

"Look here," said I, at length, "this must be the way out of it. We are already in the wrong part of the train for London; and in the *right* part for Brighton. The guard told me not to forget to change at Lewes. Well—suppose we do forget?"

"But my luggage?"

"We will wire from Brighton that your port-manteau is to be put in the cloak-room." I saw myself as a very Napoleon of organisers—for about a minute.

Baillie frowned and looked out of the window. After briefly surveying the passing and rather dreary landscape, he remarked, "I'm thinking I must be getting home to-night, Swift. I will have to be at work to-morrow at ten o'clock."

"There is a train leaving Brighton at eight-thirty. You shall catch it without fail, because I shall be catching it, too."

That ought to have settled it. "I do not

think I will dare do it, Swift. The train might very well be late. A wee bit late and it would be enough." He added, more brightly, "Or maybe, I would oversleep myself."

I own this made me rather short with him. "Well, I naturally thought you would like to see Honesty as soon as you could. Still, do as you deem best for yourself."

He was hurt. "It is n't for myself I will be thinking. My ain folk expect me home this night."

There's a modern lover for you! As if he could n't have wired to his "ain folk." If I were in love with Honesty, nothing short of wild horses should keep me from her at this juncture. I would get to her somehow, despite wild horses.

"Shall I bear any message from you to Miss Dene?" I asked, trying hard to remain patient. "I shall see her directly."

"I have no message for Miss Dene that you could not give better as coming from yourself, Swift," he retorted quite ridiculously. "If you will tell her that I would be glad to write, it is likely she will give me an address." After that we smoked in silence. But the lad's better feelings finally prevailed. As we were nearing Lewes, he laid his hand on my knee, and said in a shamefaced sort of way "Eh, but my heart's sore for the lassie, Swift. It is dreadful she

should have been suffering—the whiles we were taking holidays.”

“We must make it all holidays for her now,” said I.

He shook his head. “I misdoubt we can do that,” he answered soberly. “Sorrow dies hard. She had no one else. Think of it, Swift.”

“Are you sure there’s no one else?” I questioned, to give him a lead. He jerked his pipe back to his mouth, and puffed forth volumes more eloquent than words. I caught him eyeing me in a Scotch inquisitive way, presently.

However, prudence before all else. Baillie must get out of the smoking-carriage at Lewes, and set forth to find the others. I had the time to spare, so went up the platform with him. We passed Miss Harrison and Gatherway, not alone—but giving one the notion that they would like to have been. Next, we discovered Eva. In fact, she was looking out for us.

I explained matters to Aunt Sophie, who, of course, was all exclamations. “I was wondering what you were going to do with that other house, Mortimer,” she observed; then, fortunately for me, the guard blew his whistle.

“Jump in, sir, going on,” he cried in a breath, reminding me of Billy.

Jock jumped in and settled down in Eva’s corner. I heard her whispering. She had been

saving it for him. I nodded, and waved my hand; then returned to the Brighton part of the train, making mental notes that Eva must be advised to leave Baillie alone. She must n't interfere. How on earth can I be a genie if she's going to upset things?

On the whole, I was not very pleased. Jock certainly appears inclined to take it all for granted. I wonder if he *does* love Honesty. It looks as though she were doing all the loving now; whereas before——

That's the young man of to-day! I believe he would put a football match before any other kind of match, no matter how pretty and desirable the girl. Everything is turned round in these times. All the stories and novels I used to read concerned one heroine and many men. Modern novels make it the other way, with a vengeance. Girls, according to the present-day novelist (most often a woman, so she ought to know—and does n't) do all the courting. *The Man Hunters*, was the title of a book I picked up at a book-stall only this week; and I wish I had n't. The audacity of the theme was only equalled by the treatment of it.

I got to Brighton in a low frame of mind, therefore. I met Honesty in the King's Road. She had already seen the worried lady who keeps the boarding-house. It soon became obvious

that the worried one had not been discreet. Honesty had heard of my visit; had asked shrewd questions. In fact, I speedily perceived that, in the words of the poet, she knew all.

She strongly objected to my harmless little plot. "No doubt you have acted with the best intention, Mr. Swift," she announced, with some constraint. "But you must think very poorly of me if you imagine, for a moment, I can accept such charity. Please let me speak. It is charity, and you know it. You must blame my pride—false pride, if you like—but I will not accept charity just yet."

"You are a little unjust to me, child——"

"Ah, forgive me! I do not mean to be unjust, and I know I have much to be thankful for." She laid her hand on my arm as we walked, then quickly drew it away. "It is a pity that I should be so wilful, I know; but I have always been wilful."

"What, then, will you do?"

She shrugged her little shoulders and laughed piteously, at least so it seemed to me. The night was cool after the rain; autumn was very present. "I must make other plans," she said, after a while. "I shall go back to London—to Paradise Street."

"And then?"

"I shall try to get such a place there as the one——"

"I have spoiled for you here?" I interrupted.

"You have n't spoiled it for me. You wanted to, and tried to; but I would n't let you." She smiled at memory of Paradise Street. "I shall be all right there," she added, as I read her thoughts.

"You will have some one at Paradise Street who loves you," said I, jealously.

She glanced at me, just such a look as I had noted before. "You mean Billy?"

"Euphemia Felicia Jubilee," I corrected her. This time her laughter had a better ring. "Now come with me, and we'll have a little supper-party all to ourselves at a place I know of. We will talk over ways and means."

"Ways," she interposed; "only ways, please. I must be independent."

"Means shan't be given a chance," I promised. "We won't even hint at means." I remembered to ask her again about the typewriting. "Have you given that a fair trial?"

"Gracious, yes! And I type rather well, too. That dear little chap at Wright's taught me so cleverly."

"It was his pleasure and privilege——"

"So he always declared. . . . Did I tell you that once I—crept back to Carbridge? It was

when we were at Paradise Street. I saw our house was sold, and I asked a child in the road who had bought it." She drew in her breath, and I did not dare to speak. Presently she went on about the typewriting. "All the typing schools cut one out. Pupils pay to be taught, and practise on the manuscripts sent in to the schools. They can afford to type at sixpence a thousand words, and type really decently. Is n't it awful?"

"Awful every way, I expect. But how about becoming lady typist to some firm? Plenty of people can do with a really capable girl secretary."

"Are there such posts and such people?" inquired Honesty, doubtfully. "Or are you inventing both?"

"I could n't be half so brainy," I told her. "Here's the restaurant. Come along, and we'll find a quiet table." She hesitated, but eventually agreed to pass before me through the doorway. The too-obliging waiter soon put us at ease; and, as it was still early, we had the place practically to ourselves.

I ventured, very carefully, to commence the hatching of yet another plot. I recollected my cousin, Harry Duveen. (I expect you have forgotten him utterly; although I told you, at the end of Chapter III., that he was prospering ex-

ceedingly at something to do with shoes, in a village near Bath.) Why should n't Harry Duveen want a lady typist? If I can only get Honesty safely to Paradise Street without suspecting anything, she can remain there rent free, since I have paid Mrs. Jolliman in advance for my room. Behold me a Machiavelli. I do hope I shall bring this conspiracy to a better issue. I shall run down to Bath during the week; I shall make Harry see that his triumphs are incomplete, his prosperity unframed, as it were, so long as he is without a lady typist. I shall coax his little wife to help me; she will understand the case when I have explained it to her.

Perhaps she won't—still I'll try, all the same.

CHAPTER XXIII

HONESTY has been safely convoyed, with her few poor belongings, to Paradise Street, and Billy is in a seventh heaven. Memory of that queer little thing's unaffected delight at the recovery of Honesty is something worth treasuring.

I cannot altogether understand Baillie. He went with me to meet Honesty at Victoria on Monday night, because I made him; but he would n't come on to Clapham. He had some excuse or another, and I felt very uncomfortable, as I had evolved a variation in my schemes, whereby Honesty and he were to be left alone in a compartment of the train whilst I smoked. I did manage to leave them at Victoria for a bit, under pretence of getting the tickets; but I found them on my return still talking stiffly to each other on the draughty platform. In the end, we had to waste Jock's ticket, and go on by ourselves to Clapham Road. Then we took a double-decked tram to Paradise Street, for a halfpenny each—which certainly made up for the preliminary extravagance.

Billy's parent was grappling with a headache (probably in the nasty little public-house at the corner), so that I was able to introduce Honesty in quite my own way. Both those dear creatures, Mrs. and Miss Jolliman, were as joyful as myself at the meeting, and Honesty was not permitted to cry, even for appearance' sake. Of course she must needs "arrange" with Mrs. Jolliman about the rent of the room, and I allowed her to settle it in her own fashion. Mrs. Jolliman was in my plot, as I had taken care to write a small note, which I slipped into Mrs. J.'s hands whilst Billy and Honesty were engaged for a minute or two in some astounding learned discussion concerning Billy's new clothes. Thus, I am continuing my career of deception, and am vastly enjoying it.

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I have framed an advertisement for to-morrow morning's newspaper. The answer will come to Honesty quite naturally from Bath! What a diplomatist the world has lost in me. Why was I ever "took literary"? I am sure I could have done better at an embassy, or even in the secret service.

I am able to record, however, that the *Little Marvels* are behaving well. Their sales have been most satisfactory, and Gatherway has posi-

tively forwarded me a cheque. Not a cheque for a large amount, mind you. This must be (so far as I am concerned) a modest and reliable chronicle. It is only in the realms of fancy that people become rich in a moment as the proper reward of their efforts or abilities. In real life fortune is not hasty. She takes her time, and has been known to come—too late.

You must not cherish delusions about authors and editors. They work just as hard as most men, and often harder. They're none the worse for it. The best work in this world has usually been achieved by the hardest-worked man or woman. Reflection will soon supply you with proof of this. Take yourself, for instance.

Meanwhile, I will get along with my business—which now brings me to Bath Station, on the Great Western Railway. You must please discover me waiting for the stopping train to Bristol, by which I intend journeying to the small village where my cousin, Harry Duveen, does something weird and wonderful with shoes.

While I wait, behold Harry himself. He is like Eva, only different and bigger. I mean if you knew Eva you would recognise Cousin Harry. He is a fine fellow, and, as I have hinted, fortune is not lagging behind him. He has acquired some touch of the Somerset mellowness of tone, and contour. He is delighted

to see me, and so full of a really amazing machine for making hooks for eyes—I should say, eyelets—that I cannot anyhow coax our conversation towards typewriters. He is also going to St. Keynes, having arranged a most important afternoon's business in Bath. From something he lets slip, I half suspect that the business was partly connected with the new fishing-rod which he is carrying. In the stopping train the hook machine prevails over all other topics; it rules them with statistics, technicalities, and highly complex descriptions. "Suppose my finger is the valve. Well, it bobs up and down just like this, whilst the hooks are settling towards the bottom of the feed. See? Then the valve lets 'em through in two streams, one at a time; and natural gravitation takes 'em down two slots, where they slide out comfortably into two kind-of-scissor things which the man holds. See? The man clips the scissor-things together soon as they 're full, and catches the points close and tight, so that the hooks are all one way up, and can't move. Then he passes them over——"

"The scissors or the hooks?"

"Both; they 're all in one piece now—see? Another chap collars hold of the scissors that are full. First man turns to fill another pair. Second man whips the heads of the hooks flush under the press, slips the sheet of celulloid over

them, all colours, you know. We do eyelets for any kind of shoes, slippers, or boots. Stays, too. We have a huge corset factory at Bath."

"Don't shatter all my ideals, Harry: I don't want to know how stays are made, or that they're made at all."

"Oh, well, we'll get back to the hooks. The press is steaming hot; can't bear to touch it hardly. Down it comes on the hooks—bang!" His hand falls on his knee with a resounding slap, and the other passengers turn to glance at us. They recognise Harry, and smile and nod. He shouts out various greetings to all and sundry; has an answer for every one. Temporarily the hooks are left under the press, thoroughly banged. As we near St. Keynes I get a chance, at last. The subject is brought before the House. We only get as far as a first reading of the Bill, and Cousin Harry is doubtful as to whether we shall carry it any further. Even if we pass it through Committee, there is still a House of Lords—Cousin Harry's little wife! He fears she won't in any way approve a lady typist; more especially a young lady typist.

That being the situation, behold me a master of tactful persuasion. Harry admits he wants help in the office; that the clerical work is really beginning to bother him. "We sent out over a million eyelets last week, my boy," he declares,

"and when the hook machine's in full going order, we shall do a million of them as well. Yes, I could do with somebody extra, and a good handy girl would be all right; especially if she could take the correspondence. You see, I have to give so much time to the practical part of it; keeping touch with the details—thinking out new patents and improvements——"

"Of course, of course," I interrupt, fearing a recrudescence of the "hook" machine. "You would find Miss Dene invaluable, I know. She is a most capable, excellent girl, and very quick. As regards emolument——"

"Oh, I would give her a pound a week at the start," says Harry, instantly. "And she could 'dig' down at Connor's. They have a nice room they might let, and the lass would n't be lonely."

"Do try and arrange it for me, Harry," I beg, delighted at this. Connor I remember very well; a nice man, working with the chocolate people in Bristol. I know the house, by the side of the little river that runs through St. Keynes into the Avon. Honesty would be comfortable with Mrs. Connor, a most homely, motherly woman. "I should like to make the necessary arrangements with the Connors," I add, over-anxious to do my best.

Harry Duveen gives me a queerish sort of

look. "This Miss Dene's a *protégée* of yours, Mortimer, it seems?"

"She is a poor child in whom I am very much interested," I tell him. "I am hoping she will not have to stay long as Miss Dene; in fact I am tolerably sure your wife need have no alarm for you." I laugh, but Harry shakes his head.

"I'm afraid—" he is starting, when I interpose. I give him briefly a notion of the case; explain Baillie, and the rest of it. Of course, I don't say anything about my own little final scheme of returning Honesty to her garden. That somehow is a climax which must be reserved as a climax. It may need all the engineering I can command, and I don't even understand hook-machines yet, notwithstanding Harry's picturesque description of them.

We arrive at St. Keynes. Harry regards me as a rather soft-hearted, easily-imposed-on creature—if he does n't think worse. I suppose it does sound absurdly philanthropic, and yet to me it's perfectly natural that I should want to help Honesty. Supposing she were an old woman, or anybody but Honesty herself, should I then be so ready to appear unselfish? I am helping Honesty, because I *like* doing it. There!

I *am* sentimental. I must confess it. Inside my pocket-book, pressed between the leaves, is a little, withered flower—a columbine, that has

to stand for remembrance. I have been unsentimental for so many, many years; and directly Honesty has been made happy I will be as crusty and fusty and disagreeable again as any one may desire.

So we come into St. Keynes, and call at the factory on our way to Cousin Harry's house. Everything at the factory is soon found to be in order, for which I am glad—the smell of camphor being a trifle too pronounced even for one who really rather likes it. Harry explains it is the celluloid that makes the atmosphere so pungent, and protests that he has never had one of his people away with cold yet. "They simply can't catch anything while they're in my factory. As a matter of fact, a lot of the villagers come here to be cured. Whenever I drop in suddenly I generally find one or two of them standing about the doorway, pretending they have business."

"You have a good many girls employed here, have n't you?"

"Upstairs; so they can't be the attraction."

Harry shuts the door of the camphory place carefully behind him. "Come along; I expect you're starving." I note he has left the fishing-rod behind in his small office. I admit that, whilst not exactly expiring for want of food, I could still do with a mouthful. "Let us hope

there will be more than that," laughs Harry, as we trudge up the street. "Had rare doings down here since I last saw you," he presently instructs me. "First of all we have had a regular stand-up fight with the traction company, who nearly rushed us into allowing their trams through from Bristol to Bath."

"Would n't trams be rather convenient for St. Keynes?"

"My dear fellow, of course! That's just the trouble. We should have the place full of Bristol riff-raff in a jiffy. Then rows of cottages; then streets of 'em ever growing. Then Bristol would reach out one of its dirty paws and rake us in! St. Keynes would become a suburb—and that's always the end of individuality and everything else worth talking about."

"Any other doings?" I did n't want to press Honesty too much. I was fairly satisfied with my progress up to this point.

"Anything else? I should think so!" He sinks his jolly voice to a whisper which you could hear the length of the street. "The White Lady's been at it again."

"The White Lady?"

"Walking all night, swishing her petticoats about the corridors; tapping on the windows; carrying on just as though she owned the whole

show. Maude's been crazy about her; swears she won't stay in the house a minute longer than she can help. I said, 'You must, my dear. This village is our living. It's good style to run a ghost, especially a lady ghost.' No use my arguing, though. 'Either that woman goes, or I do,' vows Maude. It positively came to that."

"What are you going to do?"

"That was last month," grins Harry, cheerfully. "The White Lady had the sense to perceive that Maude meant it. Moreover, it's beginning to be chilly of nights; our White Lady has returned to warmer climes. We have heard nothing of her for three weeks; and we hope for the best. There is Maude at the gate, looking out for me. She's wondering who the dickens I have brought with me, and whether the cold mutton will make enough for three!"

CHAPTER XXIV

THE House of Lords is considering the Bill, but has already added so many amendments, that I begin to doubt whether the faithful Commons (Honesty and her pride) will accept the situation. I almost believe the Bill will be lost, after all.

Dear me, what a duffer I am in this affair! One would think it easy enough to help another person if one tried; but it is n't easy to help Honesty.

However, I can't keep running about the country like this, and neglecting my sacred sub-editorial duties, in order to achieve a series of ridiculous failures. I must settle Honesty; and insist on her being happy——

It's all very well to tell people they must be happy whether they will or not. It can't be done; and, remembering the terrible loss the poor child has sustained, I am a brute to expect her to take much interest in life just at present. I sometimes try to think what it must be like to have lost your home, and then your very dearest

friend in all the world. I do so wish I could comfort her; but I see that only time can do that.

I had the oddest dream last night, through listening to gossip anent the White Lady, contributed by Harry and his little wife after a somewhat heavy supper. I ought to be thankful it was no worse than a dream: these Somerset Duveens are so hospitable, and eat so heartily themselves, that one is forced to slightly exceed the limit, out of sheer etiquette!

Dreams are foolish things at the best, and I am not superstitious, so I will only outline the strange fancy that held my sleeping thoughts last night. I was in Paradise Street, and it was summer still, but very hot and uncomfortable. Billy was swinging herself between the poplar trees, and eyeing me with disdain. In some way I was in her bad books. "You ought to know," she was saying; and each time the swing brought her within striking distance she kicked out towards me a small, vicious foot. "You, with your conceit and all." I found myself absurdly anxious to explain that it *wasn't* my fault, whatever it was; but she only went on swinging. "I hope you'll be sorry for it," continued this vision of Miss Felicia Jubilee Jolli-man, angrily; "I hope she'll come and haunt you for the rest of your days! I hope she'll tap

on the windows in the dead of night, and frighten you into a million billion fits!" Again I tried to speak, but my tongue seemed horribly tied up in my mouth. "I hate you and I hate your old books. You took away her garden, you did. You're worse than Hire Purchase and Promissory Note, you are. Oh, don't I just hate you!" She swung herself furiously. "You'll hear her creeping along the corridors: always coming nearer and nearer, and yet never coming at all. *That'll* pay you out. Stealing her home and stealing her heart; and all for a lot of cripples! You and your cripples, indeed!"

Surprise so much got the better of slumber that I nearly woke up. Then my memory flashed to my brain that once Jones had said something about the vicar of Carbridge wanting Honesty's home for a play-house for little cripples! I had scarcely given the remark attention at the time—yet here it was fully crystallised by Billy into a grievance against unfortunate me!

Odd that my dream should make Billy so ferocious. Queerer still that phrase, "stealing her home, and stealing her heart." But dreams are supposed to be only incoherent workings of a tired brain; senseless repetitions and variations of things heard during the day. As I sat in the early train, homeward bound from St.

Keynes, I plainly saw that the White Lady had influenced this nightmare.

It was a nightmare too. At the end of it Billy had appeared to literally swell with rage. As she swung ever higher and nearer, she had seemed to grow and grow—until I was threatened by a literal giantess, an overpowering fury who meant to exterminate everything in her way. I was quite helpless; presently she would be able to sweep me up even more thoroughly than Gatherway in his happiest moments. I was the man in the story of "The Pit and the Pendulum"—you have n't forgotten that eerie masterpiece of Poe's?

However, just as that Juggernaut of a swing was on its last downward journey, swooping to crush me to atoms, I made the effort and—woke! It was still dark, and being in a strange room, I found myself positively upset. All sorts of weird noises sounded about the house: really it required very little imagination—and, presto! one had the White Lady in full sail!

The country was very beautiful, I thought, as we skimmed through it this morning. Bathampton to Chippenham is a charming little bit of England, and typical, too. Then Swindon, with its maze of lines, its workshops, and all those multitudinous engines of all ages and conditions standing about everywhere. Poor rusty old

ghosts (ghosts again!) of bygone days, representing the then pinnacles of somebody's ambition: the *dernier cri* in engines—so soon to be at their own *dernier cri*. I saw in my mind the blithe inventor—Harry Duveen and his hooks put it in my head, I suppose—joyfully regarding the great improvement he had achieved; telling the tolerant shades of old George Stephenson and Timothy Hackworth just where *they* had been wrong, just where they had stopped short; and then the blithe inventor, a shade as well, frowningly regarding another generation busy perfecting totally different types of locomotive engines.

My hand here for all time, thinks man—and lo! the invention is obsolete even while he lives. Or, if he performs an actual miracle, one that shall survive all years, such as the pyramids or the sphinx—then the work annihilates the worker, and his name is lost yet more completely.

So, poor rusty triumphs of an hour, be grateful that you are not on the scrap-heap! Exposed as you are to all weathers, still you *do* exist tangibly. It is yours to see the proud “compound” leviathan humming by you; and it may be yours to welcome him later to the siding near your own—where, in turn, you shall both see some electrical monstrosity performing feats undreamed of in your brief epochs.

Progress—progress! Which reminds me that of all old slowcoaches you must be deeming me the most intolerable.

I had a busy morning of it at the offices of the *Colosseum*. We have news of Burnaby: a rumour as to his whereabouts has reached Scotland Yard, we are informed. Consequently we are all agog, and my clerk Carr can scarcely contain his feelings. "We don't want him, anyway," he permits himself to observe. "Fancy Mr. Burnaby back here again!" He added, with fervour, "I don't fancy it at all, sir—and that's the flat, downright truth."

"We shall never have such another editor," said I.

"It's to be hoped not," he catches me up. "Of course, I know what you mean, sir," he goes on, condescendingly. "And what Mr. Burnaby did n't know in the literary way was n't worth knowing. But, my eye, he was a hard nut to crack."

I offer no opinion on this delicate point, and so Carr has to get back into his own particular shell best way he can—a difficult feat, palpably. He is simply packed with recollections of our late editor—he is a popcorn only needing the warmth of encouragement to burst out in all directions. Carr would be slapping me on the back and calling me "Old Sport," in half a

jiffy. I know Carr; and much as I like the lad, I must endeavour to keep him normal at this juncture.

You would say that, living the better part of his life in an atmosphere of heavy and responsible literature, Carr must be necessarily a heavy and responsible clerk; a youth who would think in classics, and who must inevitably talk informingly, scientifically, and with nice appreciation of the value of an epigram. You would figure Carr as pale of visage, meagre, with a slight stoop, may be; his every thought a chapter, his dress lambskin slightly spotted, no date; his glance a publisher's announcement. You would be utterly out of it in every respect.

Things happen in this way. The most likely person is always in the most unlikely spot. My Undertaker is the kind of lad you would expect in the offices of the *Colosseum*; and you would expect in vain. Carr would be most suitable for Messrs. Wright and Co.; he would impart a lively and piquant air to the business of house-letting and valuing. On the smallest encouragement Carr would blossom forth into a check suit and one of those soft, impossible hats—distinguished some years back by the name of Trilby. His chubby, happy, lightly-come-and-still-more-lightly-go nature would be admirable in an auctioneer.

I quite agree with Carr, however, as regards Burnaby. Frankly, I don't want him to be taken by Scotland Yard. I want to still have a tiny sort of hope at the back of my mind that he did n't do it, after all; that he will come back one of these days and explain everything. Moreover, I am comfortable here as sub-editor; I have a free hand, and truly delude myself with the idea that the *Colosseum* is n't so bad even under its new direction. The advertising manager seems satisfied, and that's a fairly promising sign.

When I got home to-day Carbridge appeared a very delightful place. The small wriggling river is full, and by the bridge the water-lilies are blooming yet. Autumn is upon us, though: we may well have an early frost one of these mornings; then, alas for the gardens. I am always so sorry for the dahlias; they are so easily knocked over—one day full sap and arrogance; next day "boiled" and hideous. There is no fight in a dahlia; even the geranium makes a better show. Some good roach have been taken just above the water-splash, so I learn. I don't seem to get a chance with a rod now.

Honesty's garden is presentable, thanks to the Undertaker. I surprise him busy at the verges, and he blushes quite painfully, with shears suspended in action. "Good-evening, sir."

I nod, as I come up to him. "The garden does you great credit," I announce.

"Miss Jones has been good enough to render considerable assistance," the Undertaker admits at once. "I venture to hope that your gardens compare very favourably with others in this district." He surveys his work with pride. "The sweetbriar hedge needs trimming, but one has to be very prudent with sweetbriar."

He means that he does not wish to cut it, because he knows Honesty used to let it grow pretty much as it would. "The perennials are excellent," I observe, moving slowly about the garden. "Astonishingly beautiful that late phlox. And the golden-rod—that's a jolly good sort, you know. I wonder where Mrs. Dene——"

I break off, suddenly. I was going to say: "I wonder where Mrs. Dene got it. I must ask her." And the Undertaker guesses exactly how I should have ended a thoughtless remark. He says nothing, and I am glad of his silence. He is a nice boy; a tactful boy.

"Miss Jones gave me instructions that Miss Dene had come to London," he mentions, in his usual manner. "She instructed me as to Miss Dene's sad bereavement. May I be so bold as to ask kindly after Miss Dene's health, sir?"

"She is fairly well, I think. Of course, she has had a very terrible experience—has suffered an irreparable loss." I turn to the Undertaker, and, facing him, can find myself able to speak in less stilted language. I am sure of his sympathy and interest in our subject. "We must do the best we can to help her," I say. "We must try to show her that it is n't irreparable—that she must n't think of it like that. It's—it's the least we can do," I end, lamely.

He is busy at the verges again. He clips and snips mechanically a while; then in the middle of an especially penetrating snip pauses to ask, in a low voice, "Do I understand that Miss Dene will be returning to her home?"

"I can't say. I wish I knew," I answer. "I don't see what I'm to do with the property, if she does n't."

He appreciates the word "property." It is food and drink to him. He recovers promptly, eloquently. "The Home is certainly a most attractive and desirable property, sir." He stands up, and waves the shears with emphasis. "It comprises a perfect bijou residence of convenient size, with an excellent garden, well laid out and mature. The pleasure grounds, indeed, are quite extensive, and in a high state of cultivation. Carbridge is splendidly positioned amidst absolutely rural surroundings; it is a most

picturesque village, unspoiled by trams, and surrounded by large estates with park-like lands." He draws breath and fresh inspiration together. "One might easily erect a neat motor garage; and then, in view of the unobtrusive adjacence of the railway, one would have a residence comprising every advantage."

"Yes, I know. But I can't live in *two* houses," I argue, repeating my own mental conclusions of some time back.

"You can live on this estate, sir—and let your own," he suggests; forgetting that they're both my "own." "I could find you a tenant immediately" (what a boy for his trade!); "in fact, it is not too much to say you can have an exceptional tenant at practically a minute's notice——"

"Yourself?" I interrupt, jokingly.

"No less a person than our vicar," he announces, solemnly; and waits to enjoy my surprise. "The vicar of Carbridge, himself."

"Oh! does he think of moving, then? I had no idea."

"Not for a vicarage, of course. The Haven, although very eligible, would hardly be adapted for a vicarage." The shears gently but firmly deprecate the suggestion. "No, sir—the vicar has other views. He has long wished to rent one of these two residences, in connection with

his scheme for the welfare of crippled children."

The cripples again! The second time to-day. First, in a dream; and now in dignified and portentous reality!

CHAPTER XXV

THE advertisement—Honesty's—has duly appeared, and we have only to wait for the shoals of answers. I sent a marked copy of the morning's paper to Harry Duveen, and expect the decision of the House of Lords hourly. I have asked him to advise me by the same post as he writes to Honesty; so that I may be aware of the precise shape into which Maude Duveen has knocked my Bill for the Secret Assistance of an Unhappy Little Spinster.

I have also taken the liberty of sending Carr over to Paradise Street with a spare typewriter from the office, so that Honesty may keep in practice. The machine is one on which I have a reversion, as a matter of fact; therefore do not think I am following in Burnaby's footsteps, on however so small a scale. We have lately taken up new machines from one of the ring of firms, and this particular instrument was to go in part payment, but they offered so ridiculous a discount that I said I would take the typewriter myself for half as much again.

The person who had control of the matter being Me, you can perceive the arrangement easily made, and Carr, later on in the morning, sallying forth Claphamwards. He takes the typescript of the Alfred book, with my alterations (or rather Gatherway's impudent interferences) complete—and Honesty can have no objection to executing the order. Carr, indeed, is to wait for the first sheets, and has been impressed with the belief that I'm in the dickens and all of a hurry for the lot.

I have made a note to ask Honesty about that story of Baillie's which turned out to be mine; and why she played such a trick upon me. I mean to have a full and satisfactory explanation, in order that she may know I can be a tartar when I choose.

I have been touching up some shorter pieces I had by me, and taking stock of my manuscripts. I found some quite saleable efforts amongst those, and forwarded them to my agent—a most delightful fellow, who relieves me of many of the bothers attaching to literature as a profession.

The *Colosseum* work alone comes direct from my pen; all and sundry of my other attempts go through the agent. He first introduced me to Gatherway, and the introduction has ripened to a friendship, as you know. All the same, I allow the commission of ten per cent. on returns

from the *Little Marvel* series to my agent—because it's only fair.

Thus you will see that I am painfully upright in business, and that I approve of literary agents. I must admit I am specially favoured in this direction.

Fortune has been capriciously kind latterly. Some positively ordinary little stories of mine have sold for nice prices, so I can afford to send Honesty the typewriter, and also enjoy the luxury of running two houses. Particularly as one is empty!

Jones is pestering me for an autumn spring clean of the Home; I suppose the place is a bit dusty after being locked up so long. It is *not* damp, for Jones goes in every day to open the windows and light an occasional fire. The grandfather clock in the hall has been kept going ever since Baillie and I started it that day.

Baillie has been to Paradise Street, but did n't stay long. He is such a nervous fellow with women. He gives me the notion that he is afraid of Honesty, and I can't watch him as I used, in that small mirror opposite the window.

The Comedy of Love I called those morning encounters—dear me, how long ago it seems! Here we are thinking about early frosts and the like, and coals have long since risen from the abject depths of their lowest summer prices!

Fortune has been capricious, I was saying—this being a way of leading round to the recital of a strange adventure which came to me whilst Carr was gone with the typewriter.

It was in Farringdon Street, mid-day. I had just gone there for a prowling after lunch, in case any rare and astounding bargains might be blushing unseen on the bookstalls. Few, however, are the prizes which slip through the clever—if somewhat grimy—hands of the Farringdon Street dealers. Yet even the wisest amongst us are caught napping, now and then, and hope springs eternal in the bookworm's breast.

It's fine hunting for the minor poets. I have rescued some charming and wonderful books of verse from the stalls in Farringdon Street; first editions galore.

This unintelligent age seldom encourages poets to the attainment of a second impression: flashy, trashy novels run into their thousands (at least, so their publishers assure us), while the genius of the fine art of words has to be content with a circulation chiefly amongst his friends.

It is intensely pathetic to me to see all those books jumbled up together on the Farringdon Street stalls; once I found one of my own—a novel which I thought really quite epoch-making when I wrote it. The gentleman had priced it

at sixpence; which soothed my outraged vanity (for sixpence is a top price in Farringdon Street), until he, perceiving me handling it, shouted across the barrow, "Thrippence, guv'nor—there you are! Must sell out to-day some 'ow!"

I bought a History of England from this particular dealer some years back, offered at two-pence a volume. There were thirteen, and he put them in at two shillings. Other finds I have had; and to watch the buyers raking through these dust-heaps of literature is most amusing. I asked my especial fellow how business might be, and he gave a witheringly scornful glance towards the small crowd jostling at the front of his barrow: "Plenty turning of 'em over, guv'—*that's* 'ow we do biz now-a-days!"

I joined the throng, and was allowed presently to get through. Having bought a nice little volume of verse called *Story and Song* for a few pence, I dug more vigorously into the rows of books staring so appealingly heavenward from the stall. I discovered one of the suppressed *Bohns* next; and acquired that also—patting myself on the back for having got in front of another purchaser just in the nick of time. This was a man in seedy clothes and a three weeks' beard, who wore a cap pulled down over his

eyes. He favoured me with a savage stare; and—I recognised Francis Burnaby!

Surprise kept me silent. He edged away; but plainly desired me to follow. We moved to the outskirts of the crowd, walked sharply towards the Clerkenwell Road, one behind the other, Indian fashion. In the comparative seclusion of Clerkenwell Road I came abreast of him.

“Jump on this next tram—quick!”

I obeyed, scrambling to the top, at his heels. “I thought I might meet you, Swift—that’s the truth.” He shrewdly noted the other passengers. “Don’t look so scared, I’m not the plague.”

“I thought you had left England—” I was beginning.

“I hope many others share that childlike belief,” he interrupted, in the impatient manner I knew so well. “It is not easy to get out of this confounded country at any time,” he added, frowning; “especially when one has n’t the key which opens all doors. No, I have been hanging about like a thief in the night. Like myself, in short.”

“What shall I do for you,” I asked him simply, “now that we have met?”

“You can tell me things, first of all. That is, unless conscience prompts you to call the next policeman. No, I don’t think that of you,

Swift. I have never thought any worse than to class you among the glorious company of Sentimentalists. I have lain in wait for you in Farringdon Street for many days. You see, with all my cleverness, I didn't manage it quite nicely." He drew attention to his miserable appearance with a careless gesture. "Henry had what was left; he was lawyer to the last—even with his brother. Curious, your spying that *Bohn*; it's scarce and a nice copy."

I offered it to him, at which he laughed. "No, thanks! I won't rob you again." He shrugged his shoulders in very cynical style. "I merely thought of it as a possible means of getting shelter for to-night."

"Burnaby!"

"Hush—for God's sake! What a fellow you are!" Again he peeped furtively at the other passengers. Then he laughed once more. "I'm frightened of my shadow, let alone my name. It's awful to have to hate your own name, Swift; something more than an experience. Well, what do they say? What have they done?"

"Have n't you seen the papers?"

"Oh, the papers! Does any one pay any attention to them? I suppose they still have faith in the papers—in Brixton! Hal got away; I suppose they know that? He started first."

"Your brother is supposed to be in Val-paraiso."

"Wonderful, wonderful, and yet again wonderful; and after that—out of all whooping! Henry is in—but why should I give him away, even to you? Suffice it that I must join him, or starve, or be caught. Which you like."

"It does n't rest with me," I said, quietly.

"No? Listen, Swift. You can give me money, and, now that the hue and cry is over, I shall be able to escape. I have my plans, and they are sound. Who would have thought of hiding in the shade of the Old Bailey?" He chuckled, grimly. "Only a practised criminal could have seen that *there* was the safest place in all the world! And the police are looking in the suburbs, in the 'likely' spots—for a booky man, a respectable, bald-headed, middle-class fool who has just unfortunately overshot the mark." He favoured me with a sidelong glance. "You always knew I was a criminal, Swift?"

"It hurts me most to hear you talk like this," I told him then, amidst the jolt and noise of the traffic.

"I was sure salvation would come to me through you, Mortimer. You still believe in me, bless your soft and simple heart! You are saying, most unwisely, within yourself. 'There's good in that man yet. He'll pull up; turn over

a new leaf.' Of course, I like to agree with your tender faith in mankind; it is part of my scheme to make you imagine all these vain things. But I find that I prefer to be brutal. I have others depending on me."

"The papers hinted at that," I remarked drily.

"Lies!" he snapped. "But they might have told other lies. I'm not going to put all the blame on Hal, though. Perhaps you did. Well, I'm not that kind of beast yet. Hal was knocked down; and I—tripped over him. There you have the gist of it."

He accepted my silence as tribute to his old sway over me. In truth I had already forgotten the shabby clothes, the three-weeks' beard.

"Who knocked him down does n't matter," he went on, lightly. "Possibly some poor wretch running away from another equally poor; who, in turn— But why worry as to prime causes? We can trace everything back to the serpent, if we wish. It takes all sorts of components to make a man; all conditions of men and women to make a nation—all types of nations to constitute what we call the world. Hal and I are the units that don't stay in the right places; the normal cells that wilfully become abnormal—cancerous. So, at the end of it, I don't even excuse myself, you see. I merely point out,

unpleasantly, that I exist—and that an operation is necessary.”

Poor wretch, indeed, to have come to such arguments as these! I needed no argument, however; he might, at least, have credited me with that. I gave him what he asked, willingly; and, for the sake of old times, wished him good luck. Also I made him take the *Bohn*—it was a nice copy, as he had said, and I thought it would amuse him on his long journey, and help to keep him away from his thoughts. He smiled, then: “Sure, Swift, you are the dearest old—woman alive!”

CHAPTER XXVI

It is all over with the Bill for the Secret Assistance of an Unhappy Little Spinster. The faithful Commons can't possibly accept the amendments embroidered thereon by the Hereditary House.

All my little plots seem to come to worse than nothing. I shall never make a thoroughly successful conspirator. Maude Duveen was an easy match for me. Any single one of her amendments would have wrecked my Bill; and, the annoying part of it is, they're most of them utterly and perfectly reasonable, and just what I might have expected.

So I leave Cousin Harry to his hooks and antiquated methods of book-keeping. If he won't have the excellent opportunity I offer—well, he won't, and there's no more to be said.

Honesty has accepted the typewriter, on the understanding she can pay for it in instalments. I said, "Very well, a penny a day for a thousand years!"

Billy Jolliman instantly commenced to cal-

culate. "You'll have to pay over fifteen hundred pounds that you will," she chirped, being present at our interview—for the sake of propriety. We were in Honesty's room (or mine, rather—if she only knew). "It's a swindle don't you have nothing to do with it."

"I'm afraid it's paying rather dearly for the convenience," Honesty agreed.

"Make it a penny a week and then it'll be near two hundred and twenty," continued the lightning calculator. "You better buy his old typewriter right out, Miss D., or else let father get you one. He knows where to get 'em cheap."

"Talking of typewriters," said I, to change the subject; and satisfy, while I recollected the matter, a natural curiosity, "Do you know that I have discovered the author of that story you typed?"

Honesty smiled faintly—I could see she was nervous, and felt meanly glad. "I hope you gave him a good notice? That usually follows a discovery in the literary world, does n't it?"

"The notice comes first," I decided; "and then the discovery. However, we'll keep to the point, if you please. That story was mine; and you knew it. Kindly explain what you meant by pretending it was n't."

"Oh, but I did n't. Surely I only asked you

to look at the typing?" She coloured so painfully that I hastened to adopt an easier tone.

"Tell me how you chanced upon the thing. That's the mystery I cannot solve."

She owned at once she had seen the story in the *Reaper*; that the *Reaper* in question had come to her as gusty litter from the Jonesian bonfire. "I wanted some easy way of telling you that I must work. I did n't know how bad matters were then. I hoped—mother hoped we might win through, somehow." She choked a little at that thought. "One can't understand right off that the worst has happened. At least, I could n't. It seemed so utterly impossible."

"The worst never happens, my dear," I said, gently. "I have learned that—if I have learned nothing else."

She flashed a quick glance at me. "Don't you think the worst *has* happened? Don't you see I have nothing to live for—now? Nothing—nothing."

"Time will prove," I answered. "There are other folk who, perhaps, would like you to live, even if only for their sakes. And we must not think of those who are gone from us—quite in *that* way. We must not imagine them unhappy, my dear. That would be to give up hope all round, would n't it? The one common creed held by humanity all over this little earth as-

serts the contrary. We know our dear ones to be happy; surely we know that? It is n't fair to pretend to believe anything else." I took her hand, "And as for the living—well, you will always find that something compensates."

Billy perceived this to be her cue; or, very probably, was tired of being silent. "Tell us about that story," she commanded, imperiously. "Was it about adventures and all that? Or only about love-making stuff?"

Honesty drew her fingers from mine, as we both laughed. She replied to our young inquirer: "There were some adventures in it, Billy, of course. Even lovers have adventures."

"Silly ones, then. I don't care for that sort. Was it about lovers?"

The question was addressed to me, and could n't be shirked. "There was a girl in it," I admitted.

"What kind of girl? Like *her*?" She indicated Honesty.

"Much better," I untruthfully announced.

"Then I don't want to hear any more about it," declared my candid little friend. "She's"—her gesture embraced Honesty utterly—"good enough for me."

"Thank you, dear." Honesty moved to where Billy sat cross-legged in her chair, displaying a considerable quantity of striped stocking. The

child put out her arms. "He don't know much, after all—does he?" Billy remarked scornfully. "Fancy them letting him write stories! He can't reckonise a pretty girl when he sees one."

"Did n't I recognise you?" I demanded. But she was too engaged with Honesty to grant me even a hearing.

"How are you getting on with my Alfred book?" I asked Honesty, when she had emerged from Billy's comprehensive embrace.

"I hope to finish it by to-morrow, or the day after. "I'll show you—" She sprang to her feet again, and hastened to fetch the typescripts—hers and the original—from the table in the window. I pretended to go very carefully through them. "Capital."

"Really, and truly capital? Or only because I did it?"

"From both points of view. I have plenty more work for you, but first of all I want you to take a little holiday. What do you say to spending the day with me next Sunday?"

She lifted a doubtful glance towards me, her impulse being to say "No." I was not going to let her even think no, however. "Yes, Sunday next; and I'll meet you both at the station——"

"Me, too?" The pig-tail whisked front to back anxiously.

"Of course. I shall take you for a walk along the river, and show you our lions—then home to dinner at the Haven. Sunday afternoon we'll take quietly, we old people. Billy can read, or talk to Jones, or make a pie for our suppers."

"Would your Jones let me make a pie?"

"She will let you do anything, if you make a fuss over her cat. He's a wonderful animal—not beautiful, perhaps, so much as wonderful."

"What does he do?" Billy was deeply interested.

"Jones will tell you. His name is Keedels, and he's a bit of a rip—according to my mind. If ever a cat deserved to have headaches in the morning——"

"Oh, they're just nothing! Father he has headaches in the morning sometimes but that's only because he's worried at the office." Billy always gets slightly "comma-less" when speaking of her male parent. She is on the defensive instantly. I can understand why.

Mr. Jolliman hardly improves on acquaintance. I am prejudiced against him, that's the fact. He's so openly selfish.

I should admire him for having the courage of his convictions; but I don't. However, Honesty dismisses all unpleasant reflections by saying that she will be delighted to come to Carbridge next Sunday.

My busy brain plans to get Baillie to the Haven that same Sunday afternoon. Then I shall affect to want a nap, and the young folk can have a gossip all to themselves. Jones will look after Billy; or I will, if necessary.

I am not satisfied with Honesty's explanation of the story incident. Why did n't she tell me right out it was mine? Certainly, I ought to have known. Women are strange creatures—it's useless trying to understand them.

But—occasionally—I think they're rather nice, especially when they know how to look pretty. And it is n't necessary to understand them. As a matter of fact, who understands himself—or wants to? There are millions of things more interesting to do, and one is never much wiser for self-examination. Only bewildered. Or ashamed. Or enraged!

For instance—on my way back to Clapham Station I pass a small dirty, second-hand furniture and oddment shop. There are some positively grimy books on a shelf in the window, priced absurdly above their value. I study them closely, being always on the look-out for a bargain, and knowing by experience that one must n't expect to come across bargains every day. They are to be found in the most unlikely places, let me tell you—when they are in the shape of books. I bought once, in a bookseller's

in Holborn—an important, imposing shop—a copy of the *House of Pomegranates* for eight-and-six-pence—in the limited and only authentic edition. The work was published at fifteen shillings net, so the bookseller ought to have been on the *qui vive*; and at the moment I bought the copy it was worth fully two pounds. Now three would n't buy it—but let us return to the second-hand furniture shop.

I saw a queer little edition of the *Compleat Angler*, of no great value, but very charming. So in I walked, like the fly into the spider's web. A very shabby, dusty web it was, too. The spider pounced out in due course, and declined to part with the little "Walton and Cotton"—until I had parted with many arguments and two whole silver shillings. I was just leaving the shop in disgust, when a rather shoddy bureau-cabinet at the back attracted my notice. On its shelves were the usual Dutch candlesticks, copper-lustre jugs and mugs (probably direct from Birmingham); one or two pieces of old blue, and a few odd plates of Mason's ironstone china. A very hotchpotch.

The spider remarked my interest, faint as it was, and skilfully increased it: "Nice bit of old Dresden there," he opined.

"Where?" I asked, roused at once.

"In that bureau. That's an odd bit of

furniture, too; though, mind you, I'm not saying it's old. I don't really know what it is, so can't pretend to say. I don't believe it's old at all."

The way these wretches talk! You have heard them, if you happen to be a collector, for your sins. They never can "pretend to say." They're invariably doubtful, referring the point to you—as one who understands. They wilfully disparage an article, just to hear what you'll say. They know then precisely how little *you* know.

"It appears quite modern to me," I remarked, with indifference.

"I daresay—very likely. We all get had sometimes." The spider seemed about to weep, this being one of the melancholy species. They're the worst, beware of them. "But that little sugar basin's all right, no doubt about that. It's a lovely little bit. I'll get it for you."

"Oh, don't trouble; I'm not a likely buyer——"

"No trouble at all, sir; I'd like you to look at it." He crossed to the bureau (which I will swear had n't left Wardour Street more than five minutes), and opened the badly hung glass doors of the cabinet above. He raked out a couple of Mason jugs, a smashed black Wedgwood tea-

pot, a few pieces of china which he was pleased to designate, complimentarily and comprehensively, as "Oriental." Then he produced from the back somewhere a queer little sugar-basin, with a lid to it, and a dish to go underneath.

It was (and is) a pretty little piece of hard paste, although——

But that's to anticipate. On the top of the lid, by way of handle, is a rose-bud; one or two of its petals very slightly chipped. The design is quartered in four panels on each piece; two egg-shell blue—with flowers upon the dark ground; two dead white, with Watteau subjects. These repeat, as I say, on the outside of the basin and on the surface of the round dish; but each white panel shows the shepherd and shepherdess in a different scene, although generally in graceful attitudes of mutual adoration.

It is, appropriately, a sweet bit of china, and there, below the basin and the dish, are the undoubted crossed swords of the Meissen factory.

"It's only a common old butter-dish," said I, shrugging.

The spider was distinctly pained. Tears welled in his weak eyes. "Oh, really, sir—you'll excuse me, but I'm sure you know better than that. Dresden, sir: those are not even the Worcester swords. Examine it, sir—I'm sorry the light's so bad. Old Dresden, too."

"There are wheel marks across the swords, cutting them——"

"I think not, sir. A small scratch; dirt, very possibly. Allow me." He attempted to wipe the glaze with his sleeve. "Yes, sir—dirt, you see, after all."

Certainly there was dirt enough everywhere; but I could n't distinguish the wheel marks when he returned the dish to my hands. "Dirt, sir, and dirt cheap!" He laughed feebly at his feeble joke.

"I never can understand why you chaps don't have a spring clean now and then. You're all alike; your shops are the most musty, dusty, unwholesome places on earth——"

"Temperament, sir," he interrupted, sorrowfully. "It's a spare life, but it fits our humour well. You know the proverb?"

"Shakespeare," I told him. "Touchstone and Corin, in the forest of Arden."

"Of course. The Swan of Avon. 'A spare life, but in respect that it is solitary, I like it very well.' It suits us, sir; it is part of the business. That sugar-basin is really a cabinet piece; observe the exquisite finish of the painting. Only equalled by Leroy; and you have to pay for Leroy!"

"How much?"

"I bought it from a gentleman in Paradise

Street, sir—you know the spot, I see. Very old part of Clapham, sir.”

“Yes; but how much——”

“Oh, well—let me think. I gave a good lot for it; the gentleman was uncommon hard to move. Suppose we say a sovering, sir?”

“You may say it as often as you like,” I decided, putting down the basin—reluctantly, I confess.

“It would fetch best part of a fiver in the West End, sir.”

“It won't fetch it here. Not from me.”

“I have n't been doing much business to-day. Shall we call it seventeen-and-six?”

I shook my head, and prepared to go.

“It has been in the gentleman's family for years, sir. It was simply owing to a temporary financial difficulty that he had to part with it.” The spider eyed me, persuasively. “How about seventeen bob? There you are, round figures.”

“Seventeen is n't a particularly round figure,” I argued. “No, thanks. It does n't especially interest me.”

(My name should be Moses Swift, not Mortimer.)

“The gentleman valued it very high. He assured me that it belonged to his grandfather. Quite an heirloom—fifteen shillings, sir; and the

basin's yours. I'll do it up for you with the little books."

"I'll give you exactly half that sum," said I.

He held up deprecating fingers, deeply in mourning—to match his tears. "Could n't be done, sir. Thank *you*, sir, all the same." He took up the dish and the basin; and began to restore them to the cupboard.

"They're not Dresden at all," I commented, ruthlessly.

"Perhaps not, sir—I don't know nothing about china. I have n't made my living all these years by dabbling in it, of course." The spider waxed sarcastic. "The gentleman in Paradise Street, a very superior person, he said it was genuine old Meissen. It's marked with the crossed swords——"

"Oh, they all used that mark in the early days of porcelain."

"Don't that prove the basin's old?" he cried, at this slip of mine. "It's old porcelain, anyway, and I say it's Dresden. Fifteen, sir—you can't resist it."

He was right. I could n't. I was beaten; and fifteen shillings passed to the till, to keep company with the two I had already paid for the *Compleat Angler*.

Directly I got home to Carbridge I washed

the basin and dish carefully, Jones in attendance, and highly interested. "That there don't look worth much, do it?" she ventured, in due course.

"You never can tell," I said, viewing, with some misgiving, the re-appearance of the wheel marks. I dried the pieces, held them to the light. Beautiful, at any rate. Jones examined them gingerly. "What's them there little figures?" she inquired.

"Just pastoral subjects. After Watteau, the great French artist. They're shepherds and all that——"

"I mean these here little tiny numbers," she explained.

"Numbers? Where?"

Jones was right. Faintly impressed in the paste were ordinary modern numerals—signifying the factory number of the model from which later work is produced. "Old" Dresden? Certainly—not! The sugar-basin and dish were possibly made at the present Meissen Factory: but they were decorated, no doubt, by transfer-printing from the original design somewhere else! Faulty glazing, or modelling—hence the cuts of the wheel across the swords.

I have found the faults. They are slight enough—but fancy my being taken in! I, who rather flatter myself.

“Still, it’s very pretty, isn’t it?” Jones comforted me. “And no one isn’t going to take it off of the old sideboard to look underneath.”

CHAPTER XXVII

SUNDAY evening. I have had a most pleasant day of it, and believe that my guests enjoyed themselves. It was sad for the child Honesty, at first: how many times was it on the tip of my tongue to tell her that the Home is hers yet?

That item of intelligence must come from Baillie. It shall be my pleasure to tell him to tell Honesty.

A bright, warm day we have had, considering we're well in October. The garden had to be tenderly examined; but I had no great fear. Did not the Undertaker, Jones, and I go thoroughly over the ground yesterday afternoon? Verges trimmed to the acme of neatness; lawn like a billiard-table; withered flowers and dead leaves conspicuous by their utter absence. A general and comprehensive sweep-up (fully equalling Gatherway at his very best).

The only non-starter was Jock. I understand, however, that he had business in town. He came in this afternoon, as I had planned. I made them go into the garden, hoping they would stand a while at the gate—so that I might (quite

discreetly) view in my mirror the curtain just rising on the third and last act of the Comedy of Love. How one does hanker after the old ecstasies.

It's a sign of age, Mortimer. You're beginning already to say—and worse, think—that things were done much better in your “young days.” When so-and-so played that part he did this—and he did that. What's-his-name, at the New Thingummy Theatre, is really very good. That's admitted. But, my dear fellow, you never saw so-and-so!

What marvellous children we were in those good old days! Don't *you* recollect? At ten you could translate Charles XII., like pie. Algebra, at twelve. Why, equations were nothing to you. Old Cæsar, and his invasions—you could reel them off without ever wanting to refer to the vocabulary at the end. Games—I should think so! In the first eleven, my boy, long before I was in my teens. Made a century more than once; and as for the hat trick——

Your son thrusts a Latin motto before you, on the cover of his school magazine. “What's that, dad?”

“Age bene quod agis.”

Where are my spectacles? That? “age”—let me see “age bene—” Bene means “good——”

Your young hopeful grins at his mother. "The dad can't read it," he cries.

"Do well what thou doest," he tells you, triumphantly. There's something for the old man to think about; something to give him pause, now and again.

Honesty and Baillie did not make any tableau for me at the garden gate. They chatted together soberly, looked at the last of the flowers—golden-rod, dahlias, Michaelmas daisies, heathers (we have some very pretty varieties at Carbridge, I must announce; I got them, in the beginning of our gardening, from a capital floriculturist in the Lake District.)

I gave Honesty a sprig of white heather that day I came home from Gatherway's after we had settled the *Little Marvel Series*. "For luck," I had said, heedlessly.

Poor little maid! Not much luck for her since then.

Honesty and Jock Baillie not coming up to my expectations, I amused myself with Billy. She took the keenest interest in my small library, and was delighted to have a copy of one of my adventure books—"With the author's kindest regards."

She pored over it. It has pictures, I must tell you, and these attracted her: "Did he really get killed?"

"No, not really. We all thought he was going to be—but, just then, something happened. You'll know all about it, if you read the story."

"I shall read it what do you think? I always reads my books whether I like them or not." She turned to another picture. "Who's she?"

"That's the lovely girl he marries in the end."

"What's her name?"

"Bertha."

"That's an ugly name, what does it mean?"

"Do all names have to mean something?"

"Of course. Mine means the Queen's Jubilee. Hers,"—she waved a hand towards the garden, wherein Honesty and Jock still hesitated—"hers means what it says, you know. Bertha—well, anybody might be named Bertha."

"I'm sorry," I said, meekly. "I'll call my next girl Felicia. May I?"

"It means happiness that does. I wonder if I'm going to be happy? Very very really—truly happy?"

She peered up from her book so anxiously that I hastened to assure her there wasn't the slightest doubt in my mind about the matter. She accepted the statement of my convictions seriously. "Well, you know, lots of people are n't happy even though they want to be—and try ever so hard. Father he's not happy."

"Perhaps his name means something else?"

I suggested, feeling rather positive it could n't signify any extremely nice attribute.

"His name's Henry. I don't know what it stands for except Arry. I don't like Arry, do you? Some of them calls him Enery; that's beastly cheek. Course, there's his other name." She reflected.

"Jolly by name, and jolly by nature." I said, hypocritically.

"Father's not what you might call jolly neither," continued Billy, considering it. "It's his headaches and all that. And he's so worried about—" She closed her lips primly, in the manner I already know so well. Giving herself away, or nearly! "You got some pretty china, too," she remarked, definitely, changing the subject. "I love pretty things even if they are old."

"You don't love them because they're old?"

"Not much, not me!" She scorned the notion. "I like things because they're pretty, that's always the best way. Oh my—is n't that the image of our china sugar basin what mother's so fond of!" She pitched her book to the floor, and reached my beautiful old Adam sideboard in two skips and a slide. Next moment she had the spider's swindle in her hands. "Why it is mother's basin."

I suppose I must have appeared rather at a

loss; for, with the intense shrewdness which so pathetically distinguishes some of these old-young little folk, Billy put the basin back on the dish of shepherds and shepherdesses, with the simple observation: "No, it is n't, after all. I see it is n't the same, though that rose-bud being chipped made me think: perhaps mother gave it to you?"

"She—lent it to me," I compromised.

"She gave it you because you gave me all these clothes." She saw it all quite clearly. "That was good of mother, because—" She paused, fidgeting from one foot to the other, the pig-tail whisking to and fro, punctuating far better than commas and full stops: "Or perhaps father he don't much care for me taking presents from—from people unless he can pay back you know."

"You can take it home to your mother to-night," I said, guessing things quite quickly for me. "You shall put it back just where it always stands, and then no one will ever know that it has been journeying to Carbridge."

"But—is n't it yours?"

"Only while it's here," I assured her.

She slowly returned to her chair and her book, which I had picked up. Her forehead was divided sharply between the brows by a short, deep line. "I reckerlect father saying he would try

to get that rose-bud mended now I think of it," she told me confidentially. "He was going to give it to you all the time. You must keep it, you must."

"You need not let father know, my dear," I answered. Her faith in that fellow touched me deeply. Do you believe in fairies? In the Little People? I do, friend, being a rather childish old buffer. "Jones shall wrap it up carefully for you; and, soon as you get home, you will invent some excuse to pop into your mother's room—and slip those shepherds and shepherdesses into their proper place."

She made no further protest, and became absorbed once more in her book. I found Honesty returning to the house: "Hullo, where's Jock?"

"He has gone back to tea," she replied, in a low voice. "He said he had arranged to be home by four-thirty."

"I wanted him to stay to supper with us," I began.

"We don't want him if he don't want us," interrupted Billy, promptly. "It'll be much nicer all being by ourselves like—without any strangers."

Honesty laughed. "Thank you, Billy. But I'm afraid we're strangers, in a sense."

"No we're not and we're not going to be

either," retorted the comma-less one. "Come and look at this book what Mortimer's given me. It's got a picture of you in it only she's called Bertha." (Mortimer—did you notice it?) She allowed me no chance, but went on ruthlessly: "He calls me Billy and you Bertha so that's quite good enough is n't it?"

I gave Honesty the key of the house next door directly she came this morning. She would want to be alone there, I imagined, and Jones had given the rooms a vigorous dusting and "turning out"—an apology for spring-cleaning, according to her statement. Honesty did not stay long away from us, however, and I guess she had been anticipating Jock's visit this afternoon—hoping, no doubt, it would drive away sad thoughts. And he had come and gone in half an hour!

He had wished her to say good-bye to me; he would be sure to see me in the train in the morning. "Then it's certain he is n't coming in again for supper?"

Honesty understood he was going up to town to-night—somewhere in the west-end. How brutal of Jock! These twentieth-century lovers! I'll swear that we did n't go on this way in my young days—

At it again, you see! Fancy though, after boring me with all those details (and drinking

my mellow old whiskey), here's our Romeo tiring of his Juliet after a few minutes' ramble in an exceedingly pleasant and quite warm garden (although October is here). I give up lovers.

"I was thinking," says Honesty, seeing that Billy is flattering me by affecting to be lost in my book, "that perhaps you would n't mind taking me presently over your new estate?" She asked me this in a wistful fashion which I could n't altogether account for. "I hardly cared to go into the house this morning," she added, in excuse.

"I shall be delighted. You must n't think of it as my new estate. It's to be a—" Billy glanced up from her book. "A sort of—well, another Haven, you know," I added, lamely. The grand secret was nearly betrayed then.

"He's a genie he is," Billy remembered. "He just claps his hands, and people get all they really truly want. All the things they lost comes back to them whatever they are. China sugar basins and all that." She resumed her reading.

To avoid tiresome explanations I hurried Honesty away. We got candles and matches; for the evenings are soon upon us now. When we were at the door of the Home—"I found I *could n't* go in by myself," Honesty faltered. "Was n't that cowardly?"

"Empty houses are always uninviting," I said,

fitting the key to the lock. "Jock was nervous about going in here, even with me."

"I don't see why Mr. Baillie should mind going over our house," Honesty answered, in a changed tone. "There is nothing here to frighten—or interest—Mr. Baillie."

"No?" I opened the door, and we crossed the threshold together. I lit the candles we had brought, and found that thoughtful Jones had trimmed the hall lamp. That soon brightened the place, and our spirits too.

The steady old clock was tick-tacking at the right hour. Also, I had caused Jones to put some big bunches of Michaelmas daisies in the vases standing about in the low-ceilinged, dear old-fashioned parlour.

We went silently from room to room. It did not seem necessary that we should speak much. Between true friends, as Carlyle says, there can be always the better understanding of silence. Her own little room she entered alone; and I waited very patiently for her in the small lobby—on which all the doors of the up-stairs apartments open. It was not a large "estate" that we had to view; but it took time to go over it all.

I had purposely asked Jones to attend to Mrs. Dene's room; she had made it gay with a great bowl of dahlias; and on the table by the bed

my faithful serving-maid had bethought her to place a Book—one that brings comfort to us all.

Honesty suddenly took my arm, here, to the great peril of the candle. We cast queer, distorted, and rather shaky shadows on the wall, I fear. But brave little heart didn't break down; and I think she felt comforted in some manner to see the Home still as much her own as ever a willing Jones—and a clumsy man—can make it.

When we returned to the Haven we discovered the Undertaker strongly in evidence. He had ventured to suppose that he might be allowed to respectfully inquire after Miss Dene's health. He hoped and sincerely trusted that she had not found the garden so very much out of order? No doubt there were many shortcomings, so to speak, as regards the actual details; but the general effect——

“Shows me how many kind friends I have in Carbridge,” said Honesty, taking his hand. “It is very pleasant to be remembered like this, and I do thank you all—oh, so much, and so gratefully.”

“It has been a real pleasure to us,” I put in; “and we're glad you're glad! So that's settled. Please don't forget this—Honesty's garden will always remain Honesty's garden, because we are all of one mind about it; and

when many people are of one mind, one mind dominates them all."

"I don't understand that, I don't," remarked Billy, encouragingly. "You're always saying queer things, you are. When are we to have supper? She"—plainly meaning Jones—"says it's high time, if she's to get washed up before she goes to bed."

"Supper at once then—no, you are not to go. You must help me entertain. We have a place for you, here—" The Undertaker ceremoniously drew out chairs for the ladies; and, with a profusion of apologies for his acceptance of my invitation, seated himself between them.

"You got to talk to me you have," Billy told him, "because I'm on your right. The others won't mind. How old are you? Do you know Clapham? No, I don't mean the Junction that's horrid that is. I mean Clapham Road where they all go along on Derby Day. You been to the Derby? I nearly went once; but father said it was no place for ladies——"

CHAPTER XXVIII

GATHERWAY writes me that he is in London, on very important business. He desires to know whether I can take him to my club next Friday; as he understands the subject of discussion will be "something unpleasant about publishers."

I refer to my syllabus, and find that we shall discuss "Author, Publisher, and Public"—under the direction of Rollaston, of the *Balmoral Magazine*. Why Gatherway should imagine that Rollaston, or any one of my fellow-journalists, would be likely to show a hostile front to publishers—while we have the other two wretches to bully—passes my understanding. I tell Gatherway that he will be most welcome, and that if we can benefit him by letting in light on the dark places of publishing, we shall feel once more justified in our existence as a club.

We have these Friday evening dinners and talks every winter; and derive much amusement from both. Our club has held its meetings for forty odd years; always on winter Fridays—

always at the same hostelry in Fleet Street. Half-past six we sit down to a plain repast; at half-past seven (or thereabout) we begin to discuss other matters—all quite in camera; so that nobody is hurt, even when we are at our fiercest. At nine-thirty we all go home to bed, like good little boys.

Of course, you and I can guess Gatherway's "important business." He is not a brick wall; and we, therefore, see through the whole affair, and know well enough why he wishes to dine with us. Why do people always choose me when they want to talk about love, and all that stuff?

Baillie—but you recollect how he used to adopt the flimsy pretext of taking lessons in the gentle art of fishing, in order to cover consumption of my whiskey—not to say siphons.

That young man has been scarcely noticeable at all in Carbridge of late. I don't find him on the morning trains; and he does not come straight home, as all good Carbridgians have been taught to do—by their respective and respected little wives. I hear vaguely that he is working very hard; and is playing for a big stake. With true Scot's caution, Baillie has not enlightened me as to the nature of the stake; but I hope the faggot may prove digestible when he has it!

Aunt Sophie has threatened me with another

invasion, if I don't go to Knightsbridge soon. Uncle Duveen's rheumatism is so bad that the old boy has gone off to Nice—alone, I regret to discover on re-reading Aunt Sophie's vigorous epistle. Nice, as she says, with a true instinct for geography, is not far from Monte Carlo; and "your uncle is sure to be running into all sorts of mischief; being much the same as the rest of you men."

This is distinctly unfair of Aunt Sophie. Uncle Duveen, bless the old chap, will probably enjoy himself by having a good look at the various "objects of interest"; thinking himself no end of a dog and, like a dog, delighting in his freedom—and there will be the end of it. He won't go into the Casino, "impairing" his system by accepting the odds of other systems—not he. I can picture him this morning, gently promenading the warm front at Nice, arm in arm with some crony discovered at the hotel; the twain discussing rheumatism in all its branches and ramifications.

Aunt would have gone with him, she writes; but "other bothers kept me at home, Mortimer. Your Cousin Eva is giving me a great deal of anxiety; and I really fear she is joyfully contemplating a step which will make me very unhappy."

Another "ineligible" on the Aunt Sophie hori-

zon, I imagine. "She and that Harrison are quite insane and impossible," continues my worthy aunt, scoring all her points with decision and a horribly thick pen. "Neither seems to have any desire for a restful, peaceable life. They are for ever drinking tea together in Bond Street, in some utterly disreputable place; or else are having Turkish baths in Northumberland Avenue—a part of London in which no respectable person is now ever seen. If I feebly suggest that Eva should stay in after dinner to a quiet, enjoyable little bridge, with her poor old mother and one or two other nice people, she simply screams and roars—and wants to go to the theatre. Positively, Mortimer, I fear the worst. And so slangy, too—really where does the child pick it up? 'Bumble-puppy at ten-pence, and chicory at the same price, don't appeal to me a bit, mother mine. Kit and I want to see the new Aladdin,' or some such twaddle. 'She has got seats, and 'phoned me this afternoon, I must really.' Her actual words, Mortimer—and phrasing."

Poor aunt.

I shall, no doubt, learn on Friday who gives Kit the seats which prompt her to 'phone Eva that "she must really" come to the theatre, and be—gooseberry!

So I do not altogether expect Gatherway's

business, so far as I am concerned, will concern me very nearly. We are getting along nicely with our *Marvels*; and have just caught the market on the rise. They are wonderful little books, and embrace many of those masterpieces which have been lately under eclipse. We have aimed at getting together an interesting series; and, starting with Chaucer and Malory, have worked backwards and forwards from the celebrated Ancients to the best of the Moderns.

Copyright difficulties have prevented me so far from securing one small book which I mean shall eventually enhance our *Marvels*; but we shall triumph over prejudice and dog-in-the-manger policies before we have done. I refer to Wilde's exquisite essayette on the Sonnets of Shakespeare, *The Portrait of Mr. W. H.*, which at present cannot be obtained in England—more's the shame (and loss) to us all.¹

Reading over the Alfred book of my own shows me many faults in it still; but I am too busy to attempt another re-writing of it. My clerk Carr has typed one or two pages which I did amend; and has expressed a wish to have the rest of Honesty's typescript for perusal. He is a decent fellow that; but, I'm afraid, a flatterer.

I feel impelled to call at Paradise Street to-

¹ Now at last issued, jointly with *Lord Arthur Savile's Crime*, at 5/- net. M.S.

night; having some more work for Honesty, and also a creeping desire to learn whether the Dresden sugar basin (which is n't Dresden) has been allowed to remain in its proper and lawful sphere. If I find it has gone again to the spider's web I shall say something—

.

I see that I left off with Paradise Street; and it is a strange thing that my story must move forward from that spot, and in so dreadful a fashion. That poor child—I cannot forgive myself for having failed to save her. I seem to be one who is just too late in every enterprise.

It must have been about five o'clock when my tram drew up opposite the Swan at Stockwell, a time of half-light so dangerous now-a-days to unwary pedestrians in our crowded streets. I was walking along thoughtfully enough towards Paradise Street, when I became aware of a hubbub and confusion taking place on the foot-board of the tram I had left, and which now was well under way for the next stopping-place. Some drunken fellow had delayed getting down at the Swan, and was being perforce carried on to a point evidently beyond his ticket and destination. He was ringing the bell behind the driver, and was loudly protesting to the conductor, who had hold of him by the arm—evidently wishing to wrest his fingers from the

bell-button. One or two other passengers had risen from their seats, others had followed the cause of the fuss from the top compartment of the car. So much I saw, when nearly abreast of Paradise Street——

How can I tell the rest? I had hardly realised it was Billy who flashed swiftly and surely across my path into the road—before the whole miserable tragedy was upon us. She had guessed that the man was going to jump from the rapidly moving car; and she darted forward to catch him—steady him. What else was in her mind I know now. The man sprang suddenly free of the conductor into the up-road of the tramway, swayed, and reeled in Billy's arms . . . the two together fell backwards clumsily against the rear of the car, to which the brakes had been instantly applied. It seemed as if it pushed them away—just so gently that, although folks shouted, one could not believe them to be hurt.

A tram on the up line, green lamped, hammering a clangorous bell, bore down upon them; a woman screamed. Then somehow I had reached them, had torn the child from that drunken grasp. The bell sounded immensely in my ears; a rough hand thrust us outward . . . together we stumbled and staggered out of deadly peril—I carrying her through the checked traffic, a dead weight under the fading light, to the far side

of the road. There, in safety, came her first waking thought: "He's not—hurt?"

I neither knew, nor (God forgive me) cared very much. Some one told her that her father was *not* hurt; that he was there—close to her. She slid from my arms to run to him; and as her foot touched the ground a sharp involuntary cry was wrung from her quivering lips. But still she would have got to him—had courage availed.

I lifted her heart-high, despite all protestations. By this there was a crowd about us, and the police. They kindly enough made way for me, and allowed me to have my will, so that I carried the little maid to Paradise Street, past the poplars, and into her home.

I noticed that the milk can was hanging there from the spikes of the railings—a stupid detail, but in some incomprehensible style it made a note in the tragedy. Honesty met me; understood; ran back to open the door of her bedroom; ran to Mrs. Jolliman. We laid the child on the bed, and Honesty was by my side again, bathing the cut cheeks and comforting that anxious heart. "Father—he's so careless he is. He done that before—jumped off when the tram was going he did. The man said it might have killed him——"

"He's quite safe, dearest—quite, quite safe."

I heard the quick sigh of relief, as Billy's eyes

closed again briefly. Mrs. Jolliman was by the bedside, holding her child's hands. The thin little fingers were plucking at the bedclothes continuously. Some one had brought a doctor: he pushed by us to the bed.

Instantly: "Father—he's all right, isn't he?" And at the young doctor's word her eyes closed again. "My head's awful bad . . . like father's is sometimes—" Her voice trailed away into "But then the hours is so awkward, you know, enough to try——"

No worse than a broken leg, says the doctor later on (after examination), with slight concussion of the brain. A wonderful escape for the man, who is downstairs in the kitchen; sleeping now, let us hope. It made me too grossly ashamed of our frail common humanity to hear him crying over the child. It brought before me that terrible scene in Ibsen's *Wild Duck*, where the self-deceiving father reproaches himself for Hedwig's death.

Honesty walked with me to the railway station, so soon as the poor little maid's leg had been set. Ah, brave, wonderful soul in a small body—not a cry, hardly a tear. Even a smile for me as I was coming away. She made me bend my head to listen to a very secret whisper: "You haven't made *her* happy yet, you know—it's her turn it is."

CHAPTER XXIX

I CAN'T help pondering over the ironical stupidity of it all. To think that that man actually travelled by the same tram as I did. Had I but gone outside—which might easily have happened—I should have seen him, have been able to help him; he would have alighted safely with me. Or, could I have been a thought quicker as Billy dashed by me, I might at last have been of service to some one in this world.

That dream of mine at St. Keynes—of Billy, poor mite, threatening me as she swung between her poplars, has come uppermost in my mind once or twice. Of course I don't believe in dreams—still, it is odd that she should have been associated in that phantasmagoria with the thought of crippled children. Not that she will be a cripple for long; the doctor holds that everything is going along well with her, and the brain danger has already passed.

Carr is a good chap; he took upon himself to call last Sunday—yesterday. He caused a sensation in Paradise Street by appearing in what

I call a D'Orsay overcoat (a kind of frock-coat with a waist and velvet collar), a tall hat, and trousers with perfect creases down each leg. He came just before one o'clock, a mystic and important hour for Paradise Street, and gave the loafers outside the nasty little public-house opportunity for cheap witticisms. He was carrying a regular cauliflower of a bouquet; and had a box of chocolates bulging one of the pockets of the magnificent overcoat.

Honesty told me all about it; for I called in the afternoon. I had plotted to bring Baillie with me; but something which Gatherway let fall the other night gave me pause.

Which prompts me to bring you into our confidence, on condition you don't tell a living soul. Gatherway—are you prepared?—is engaged to be married.

He ate my dinner (much as Jock drank from my small cask on a like occasion) and described, very badly, all the pangs and torments which love has put upon him. How, surprisingly, he had been encouraged to be the last to find out that he was in love at all. How she had known it from the first: and had never even given him a hint.

“So like a woman,” I remarked, sententiously.

He swept me up. “So like *some* women. But Kitty's totally different, Swift, from the rest;

nothing petty or small-minded about her. She would n't say yes—or no; she wished to consider the matter rationally. Was I quite sure I loved her; had *I* considered it? 'I've considered nothing else since I saw you,' I said. 'Ask Swift.'"

"She did n't ask me," I told him. "Perhaps it was just as well."

"She's a beautiful girl," he went on, fatuously; "and, mark me, Swift—absolutely unaware of the fact. Have you noticed her eyes?"

"I've noticed that she does n't peep sideways into looking-glasses whenever she's near them," I conceded. "Also she has nice—a pretty smile, I mean."

I nearly said teeth; but that seemed, to my fastidious mind, so much like Red Riding Hood. Besides, it was Gatherway who had been doing the eating.

"A sweet smile, Swift. Extraordinarily expressive. Gives charming emphasis to all that she says." He choked sentimentally over his ice-pudding, and made worse of it by gulping a mouthful whole and unthawed. "I'm the lucky man, Swift," spluttered he.

"Bear up," said I, "there's worse to come."

He positively glared. "Ah, you cynical old humbug. You don't know what life is. You're in your second childhood before you're out of

your first. You're a fossil, Swift. There's no blood in your body. It's water, sir, water—and weak at that."

"Have some coffee?" I inquired, "and a crème de menthe?"

"Can't stand peppermint! it kills me. But, of course, *you* like it. Boyhood's days come back, as I hinted a moment since. When's he going to let us smoke? Tip him the wink, Swift."

Rollaston did n't need any tipping, or winking. "Gentlemen, you may smoke!"

I accepted a cigar from Gatherway with misgiving. When a man's in love he is n't given to be too careful—in what he eats, drinks, or smokes. It lit all right.

"I must say that Mrs. Duveen has made matters very comfortable for us," Gatherway next instructed me. "Most kind she has been, that aunt of yours. And Eva, too. You'll excuse my speaking of your cousin by her Christian name, Swift, but it is her wish."

"I've no objection," I told him. "And certainly Eva seems to have played 'gooseberry' to purpose——"

"Gooseberry," he broke in, in that sweeping style of his. "Not she. By Jove, no!" He chuckled. "I know a bit about women, Swift, and they won't stand being odd man out for

very long. I fixed it up for your Cousin Eva, after a try or two."

"The teas and the Turkish baths entertained a quartette, then?"

"Turkish baths? Oh, I see. They were the excuse, my dear fellow. Surely you didn't imagine——"

"I didn't permit myself to think about it," I said, "but all the same I am glad to be reassured. Who was the fourth party?"

"Somebody that your young pickle wanted. I'm the sharp one for finding out, let me tell you."

"You naturally wanted to have Kitty to yourself. You'll excuse my calling her Kitty; but it was just a little fancy of hers." (Had him there!)

He pretended not to notice. "Naturally we wanted to have a minute or so for conversation on intimate affairs. And Miss Duveen is restless, Swift. There's no gainsaying it. Look how she has worked that motor to death. You've heard Duveen has threatened to give it up?"

"No; has he? He's still at Nice, I understand?"

"There, or thereabouts." Gatherway was doing the winking now. "Yes, he vows he'll go back to horseflesh, like primitive man."

"And who *was* the fourth party?" He had quite wandered away from the point, as you observe, and I didn't want a dissertation on horses. It would inevitably lead to hunting, one of Gatherway's pet subjects. I also desired to hear something of the discussion on Author, Publisher, and Public.

"Oh, that was young Baillie, of course. One saw how the wind was blowing when we were at Dieppe."

"I perceived the quarter it was blowing from—as regards you—and Kitty," I said, remembering that night I had met them crossing the Plage. "But Baillie—and Eva? You're joking?"

"You'll hear," he declared, grimly. "I should n't be surprised altogether if you'd have to give two wedding presents very shortly, Swift. So save up, my laddie."

Jock—and Eva? Can it be that my story, and his story, is going to turn out all wrong? It also is Honesty's story; and I conceive Honesty as being more important than the other parties. At any rate, I decline to be a fat-headed genie, like that one which Sindbad let out of the bottle. So I did n't tell Baillie I was going to No. 117 Paradise Street, on Sunday.

I rather hoped he would be there, however, of his own volition.

Here we are wandering from Author, Publisher, and Public—and Gatherway, who had many further items to give me concerning his beloved. I spare you his rhapsodies; as you already know, from what I have written, how charming a girl is Kitty Harrison—despite her premature acceptance of Gatherway on his own estimate.

Rollaston opened the proceedings, and we had a capital speech from the club guest of the evening. But do you care twopence, or even a penny, about the matter?

It's as old as the hills, this quarrel. The author says that the publisher does n't properly pay the piper, although he insists on calling the tune. The publisher swears that he loses money—no matter what the piper plays. The public vows that it can never get what it wants—either in the way of piper or tune.

Naturally, I think the author is very badly treated. I consider that he should have the bulk of the profits, and should be regarded as a person of extreme importance. I emphatically declare that no birthday list of honours is complete, or satisfying, unless it contains (at least) one author. I claim that literature should rank equally with bacon.

In one glorious reign it was synonymous.

I tell this joke to Gatherway during a lull in

the discussion. I could see that another attack of Kitty Harrisonitis was overdue, and my ready wit certainly succeeded in keeping the trouble in check.

At half-past nine the club had talked the matter out to its own satisfaction; and so we retired to the club-room to continue the debate in more informal style. Gatherway drinks water with his; which shows him in a bad light, I maintain. The man who takes a dash of Apollinaris with it, however, is a true artist.

Gatherway retorted by roaring out (for all to hear) that he did n't store whiskey in his house by the cask, like some folk. "No," I say, "because you would n't store it at all; you would drink it."

"Is n't that the proper way to store it?" he asks, thumpingly.

He has many bad habits, has Gatherway. The tobacco he smokes (judging by that cigar) is n't tobacco at all. I should say it grew in Jersey along with the cabbages, and was dried on a wet day. Still, he's very much in love; and intends to be a good fellow. Kitty is influencing him already; he does n't sweep me up quite so unbearably as of yore.

I expect a lecture from Aunt Sophie, in due course. You have not lost sight of the fact that Kitty was designed for me? But I don't

figure well in my aunt's "system," I fear. I'm the five, under which numeral she, in common with most players, loses heavily. Nothing that I touch seems to go as it should.

What am I to do with Honesty's garden in the event of the Jock and Eva rumour becoming something more solid? I can't live in two houses; or two gardens—for the matter of that. I wonder whether Honesty could bring herself to ever care a little for——

Absurd, my dear Mortimer! Love is epidemic, like most other deadly afflictions. You are in danger of catching it, my poor, dear, deluded, round-shouldered old man. Do you mean to make an exhibition of yourself in your dotage?

I'm afraid I would rather like to!

CHAPTER XXX

THE "exhibition" (outwardly) ends in my simply repeating Carr's performance last Sunday. If I were a lover in the accepted sense (like Gatherway) I should have anticipated Mr. Carr, not have slavishly followed his example. Behold me passing the poplar trees of Paradise Street at half-past three to-day, a butt for the louts and servant girls who monopolise Sunday afternoons in the suburbs of London. I was glad to dive behind the iron gate opposite the swing, and hammer discreetly for shelter at the door of No. 117. Honesty had spied my approach from the window—and I was not kept long a-waiting.

"What lovely flowers! Where did you get them?"

She knew, I think, before I answered: "They're your own, cut haphazard. You perceive that the garden is not altogether neglected? Tell me, how is the patient?"

"Better, much better. She will be so glad to see you. But, before we go in—I want you

to be very firm with her. She will persist in trying to do things; and I know the doctor is rather anxious——”

“Anxious?”

“Only that she shan’t be a cripple for life,” Honesty hastened to reassure me. “The fracture is setting wonderfully; but I am so afraid she will be jumping out of bed—that I scarcely dare to leave her. She worries over him, you know.” Honesty whispered the rest. “He’s tiresome at times, and needs managing.”

“Needs a jolly good talking to,” I growled. But Honesty laid her little hand lightly on my mouth, a fairy touch, which instantly brought good manners; also an insane desire to kiss those small quickly withdrawn fingers. I thought of *that*, though, a millionth part of a moment too late. Typical of me.

We went in to Billy, who had reared herself up in bed in her intense curiosity. “Hello, what were you two doing out there in the hall? Was it secrets?”

“Of course not!” answered Honesty, positively blushing at this direct charge. “Look at these beautiful flowers; brought all the way from Carbridge for you. Aren’t they lovely!”

“They don’t smell very much,” opined Billy, regarding them critically. “That’s the worst of those showy things——”

"Ungrateful little girl," said I, crossing to her. "I believe you'll like these better," and produced a box of peppermint creams, and a couple of paper-backed books. She grabbed the books first.

"What's this one—adventures?"

"Marvellous, astounding. And the other I'm very fond of. I hope you will love the heroine as much as I do."

"It's long is n't it? The name's all right." She eagerly turned over the pages of *Lorna Doone*. "Does he marry her in the end?"

"Certainly. That's the end of all stories."

"It ought to be the beginning," suggested Honesty.

Billy flashed her a keen glance. "Stories about married people and their children would n't be a bit interesting they would n't. I know all about that kind of story myself."

"Well now, how is the poor leg?" I asked, to divert her mind from that particular aspect of life—the Paradise Street view of things. "I trust you're taking care of yourself?"

"*She* is," replied Billy, proudly; her nod indicating Honesty. "Help me sit up please, so's I can look at the books."

"You ought n't to, dear," began Honesty.

"There you are, I did n't ask you. I shan't hurt my old leg. Help me, Mortimer, and don't

mind what she says. She's always fussing and bothering, she is—I shan't give her a cream. You and I'll eat them all, every one." As I put my arm about Billy to lift her into a comfortable half-reclining position, Honesty moved to the other side of the bed and bolstered her up with the pillows. Billy put out her thin arms suddenly and caught me round the neck. I was favoured with a vehement (and rather pepperminty) embrace. "You're an old dear you are. Here, whisper—I put my foot on the ground this morning, I did—when she was n't in the room. I can stand all right just like I used. Don't let her know, she'd be so cross."

"Promise me you won't do it again," said I softly but with insistence. "Promise now, or I'll take Honesty away, never to come back any more."

Billy peered into my eyes to see if I meant it. "You're not going to be horrid too are you? You would n't want to be lying about in an old bed day after day when there's heaps of things to be done. Father can't get his meals proper, or nothing—while I'm here. It makes his home miserable after a hard day's work it does to come back to a houseful of invalids. There ain't no wonder he goes out again."

She paused, and then the pig-tail came to the

rescue. It whisked back to front, front to back, and the tears remained unshed.

"You want to get well, dearest, don't you?" questioned Honesty, who had gathered the gist of it. "You must get well, so as to be able to help father again. And the only way is to be patient, just a little while longer——"

"It's always a little while longer it is. That's why I hate it so. Why can't it be now, now, now! I don't want things when I'm old; when I can't enjoy them, and don't care to enjoy them. I've been here a hundred years I have; and it's always, always wait a little while longer." The pig-tail flashed to the front, hastening valiantly to save the situation.

Billy gulped her grief bravely. "There don't you mind me. I'm a beast I am. She's so good and I'm such a—such a beast! It was all my fault I got hurt making doctor's bills and all that and fresh worries when people's got quite enough as it is. It's enough to try the patience of Job, always and for ever working all hours of the night and day—to keep house and home together. And then when you do get home, there's nothing but sour looks and don't wake the child——"

Somehow she had wriggled herself into Honesty's arms by this; and there found comfort. I turned to the window, and pretended

I couldn't hear the small, pitiful weeping. I untied the string which Jones had very firmly knotted about the stalks of my despised dahlias, and attempted to arrange the beautiful flowers in a vase on the chest of drawers. But dahlias are not easy to arrange.

Presently I found Honesty by my side. "Let us go downstairs to the kitchen. Only Mrs. Jolliman is in, and we can get tea. Will you?"

I peeped towards the bed, and saw Billy deep in *King Solomon's Mines*. The storm had passed.

So we descended, like two children, to the lower and more material regions of Paradise, hand in hand, and spent a pleasant time getting the tea. Mrs. Jolliman was in, but asleep. She woke up, all apologies; but Honesty ordered her off to her own room. "A little rest will do you good. You go upstairs and lie down, quietly. Mr. Swift and I are going to be useful, for once."

"But I must show you where to find the tea. And the fire's gone out, too. Oh, dear, dear, I'm so sorry." Mrs. Jolliman began to fuss about the kitchen in an aimless manner. The place was most untidy; and, man-like, I began to think that, perhaps, there *was* some excuse for Jolliman——

Honesty soon found the tea—in the identical

little Dresden sugar-basin that you wot of. "Ah, yes, a nice bit of chiny that, Mr. Swift. Used to belong to my mother, it did. There was two of them, and six plates, and three square dishes. One of my lodgers said they was real old chiny, and worth ever so much. The child sets a store on that there basin, because her father says it's so valuable. But the plates is all cracked. Do let me light that there fire, Miss Honesty! You'll make yourself so black, you will."

The fire yielded to our joint ministrations, and then Honesty had her own way. Mrs. Jolliman, expostulating, was hurried away to her room. Honesty returned triumphant. "Now we can get the place to ourselves, and reduce chaos into something more resembling——"

"A kitchen," said I, smiling. Between us, we bustled to some purpose. Jones would have stared to see me—washing up, and drying, and putting away into their proper places a small battalion of plates and dishes. I must confess that I did not relish washing the knives. They wouldn't wash, simply—until Honesty showed me how. Wonderful what a lot she knows.

Then we laid table: for two, if you please. "I'm going to take their tea upstairs," announced Honesty, "*after* we have each had a

cup. For, really, I must say we deserve some kind of reward."

"You could n't give me a reward that I like better," I said.

"Men always love tea," she remarked, quite mistaking my meaning. "Now, sit down, please, and cut some nice thin bread and butter. Gracious, not so thick! You must cut bread *towards* you, not downwards. Like this."

In a minute or so, behold a dish of dainty bread and butter, fit for a king and queen.

I felt royal, too—sitting side by side with Honesty. Never had we seemed so near, so intimate. Was it strange that, presently, my hand should find hers in some oddly natural manner, and my fingers close about those others, so soft and so yielding?

"My dear," I heard myself saying, "do you know I want to tell you some very important—and very difficult—news? And for the life of me, I don't know how to begin."

"I fancy," said Honesty, quietly, "that you—have begun."

"It's about—" and I plunged straight to the truth of it, instead of being a tiny bit diplomatic—"It's about John Baillie—and my Cousin Eva."

Honesty said "Oh" in a round kind of voice, and gently pulled her hand from under mine.

Having thus lost everything to hold me safe to the shore, I floundered about in rough waters quite hopelessly, "I believe they're going to be engaged. In fact, from what my friend Gatherway told me——"

"Yes?"

"He said, they *were* engaged—and only waiting my uncle's consent."

She was silent so long that I imagined I had better go on. "I hope, my dear, dear child, you won't take it too much to heart. I've told you very badly and stupidly, and not at all as I meant to. But, perhaps, it was better to get done with it quickly."

She turned steady eyes towards mine. "Why do you say that?" she questioned, gravely.

Fire roses flamed in her face at my silence; died down. "It is strange you should think that I——" She paused, trying to choose her words. "Do you actually believe that your news is very dreadful? For my hearing, I mean? Is it possible that you believe that I care one tiny scrap; that you imagine my heart beats faster—because of what you have told me?"

She smiled whimsically, and pushed back her chair from the table, then moved away from me, crossing to where the kettle was clamorous on the hob. Her face was hidden; I fancied

that she laughed, then I knew it was not laughter at all——

Somehow I, too, had risen; had reached her. The kettle was threatening us both fussily, but I caught her away from it, and she was in my arms. "Have I been wrong?" I demanded, so roughly, that my voice was new to me. "Wrong all through and through? Don't you care for him; don't you? You seemed to, once——"

Her mouth was closed, but her eyes answered. I kissed her lips; and she came to me, and was mine; utterly, and for ever.

Looking back, I cannot yet believe it. Is it credible, when one is quiet, and alone, and a little chilled? That she, so young, should love me, so old? That she, so very beautiful, so sweet in thought and in deed; an angel——

Angels are to be discovered—even in Paradise Street. I know that this is true. True also that the kettle boiled over in great indignation, so I suppose we could n't have been attending to it!

Honesty has chosen to be blind to my many imperfections—or has she only deceived herself into thinking she loves me? Thus I torment myself, even in the midst of all my raptures. She has given herself to me in gratitude—for the very little I have done for her: hers is a daughter's love—for one who has only tried to be kind.

Or, perhaps, her pride. Does that bid her make pretence, in order that none may guess how cruelly she feels her loss in love?

Again I tell myself, tinglingly, that it is true—that a miracle has come about. Have we not settled all the world's politics, we two, for all time? In future there will just be the Haven, and all the world will be contained within its four walls.

I am afraid that they had to wait for their tea, those others. The kettle had to be coaxed back into good humour. Lovers are dreadfully selfish—and minutes were seconds—no more; indeed, not so much. Mrs. Jolliman did n't rest upstairs long enough. We fortunately recognised that it was all over, that amazingly glorious, never-to-be-forgotten hour, at the precise moment that she re-entered the kitchen. I was sufficiently natural to permit her to discover me cutting more bread-and-butter; whilst Honesty was on her knees before the expiring fire, trying to blow back life into it.

I don't fancy she guessed anything. She certainly did ask if I was preparing for a school feast; but Honesty came to the rescue. She turned, in flushed and charming confusion, to vow she had quite overlooked the fact that there was already bread and butter enough for a dozen, and hastened to brew and pour out for

Mrs. Jolliman a cup of the most delicious tea that ever I remember to have tasted.

I don't mean I tasted it from Mrs. Jolliman's cup. I had mine from Honesty's. Then my darling escaped, on a pretence of taking tea to Billy; leaving me to discuss the quasi-Dresden sugar bowl with Mrs. Jolliman, whilst she discussed a second cup of somewhat over-drawn tea. She made up for that, however, by telling me all about Mr. Jolliman's headaches; the topic naturally starting from strong tea, as she said.

He can't put down his headaches altogether to that.

The subject did not especially interest me, and Honesty was so long away, that I ventured to institute a search-party, consisting very completely of myself solus. I found her with Billy, who was gravely regarding food and *King Solomon* in turns. "Jolly fine it is just the sort," declared my young friend, favouring me with the briefest glance. "I've read six chapters nearly and I got to where they go down! My! would n't I love to find those mines. D'you think it's really and truly?"

"Part of it, perhaps——"

"I shall go to Africa when I'm married, if they've killed off all the lions and tigers. Thank you very much for those flowers; Honesty says

I forgot to thank you. I'm always afraid of 'em, you know, they're so earwiggy. Once I knew a girl who had an earwig crawl right into her ear it did. Oo, it was awful!"

I learned very shortly afterwards that THE great problem had been settled. That busy little brain had immediately perceived that we could n't want to live in two houses, in any case. So one must be got rid of.

"I could never part with the Home," I argued.

"Of course not! But you would n't mind moving the Haven into the Home, would you? It would n't be difficult, and—change is good for us all. I would help with the precious books."

"I must talk it over with Jones."

"We will talk it over with Jones afterwards." I observe that she means to be first, this small but extremely important person. "I have an idea. Why not do as that funny boy suggested—turn the Haven into a play-house for—" She checked herself hurriedly.

"Play-house for what?" demanded a sharp little voice.

"For little children, Billy. Don't you think that a capital notion?"

"It was cripples he said. I have n't forgot. Cripples, but I'm not going to be a cripple never fear. I'm going to do adventures and go to

Africa. Where are you two going when you're married?"

"I—I don't know—" faltered Honesty, and then she peeped aghast into my face of consternation. But our young lady had n't quite intended her question in that embarrassing manner. "One of you might go to Africa with me," she proposed, wistfully, "because it would n't be altogether likely you'd both be going to the same place would it? You might want to live side by side though so I would n't give the Haven to no cripples. There's lots of other things you could do with it better than that."

Thus Honesty's "idea" got sat upon, even as she— But that's tellings! I walked home to-night from the station at Carbridge (she came with me to the Clapham station) literally on air. What a lovely world it is; how amazingly beautiful! I stood for a while, under the stars, bareheaded, and the scent of the sweetbriar was as frankincense. Is it a dream? Tell me. Or am I only the luckiest fellow alive?

CHAPTER XXXI

It is not a dream, but only a secret. Honesty wishes it to be the latter—for the present. I understand why, and love her all the more for it.

I am to move into the house next door. That has been ordained; for the fates seem to be with Honesty all through. I weakly mentioned her notion to the Undertaker: he promptly carried it to the vicar. As a result I was “approached,” as they say in the papers, and negotiations were opened for the sale of the Haven.

I can’t bear to think of it; so I don’t. Jones is quite easy about the matter. “One good thing, we shan’t lose our cat. He’ll soon find out where to go. It’ll be same as before to him, because they’ll hardly turn him out—if he does go in their kitching.” Jones is reconciled, therefore. Moreover: “We should have to have a spring cleaning anyways in both the houses; and now I shall only have to do one. It will be a easy move, too. You’ll be able to carry your books in yourself, and all your writing-papers, and your china.” She asks a

question which I have long feared to hear. "Ain't you ever going to bring them Queer Toes back from the orifice?"

"I—ah, no. In fact, I have sold them." (Jones must know the truth sooner or later; and the fiction of their being at the "orifice" can't be lived up to eternally.)

"You sold them? You never said nothing about it."

She is plainly affronted: so I tell her the bald facts. "Yes, I sold them to help pay for the house into which we are about to move. They more than paid for it, I may say. I could n't allow Miss Dene's garden to belong to any one else."

Jones receives the information in silence. She turns it over mentally whilst she clears away my dinner: "I wonder you could bring yourself to part with them Queer Toes," she remarks, as she puts the finishing touches to her work. "I thought you wanted to get another of them, or something, and have 'em all bound up together."

"It was you who suggested that," I reminded her grimly.

She brightened considerably, evidently taking this as a compliment. "We shall have a lot more furniture than we can do with," she decided, before leaving me to my pipe and evening

paper. "That there boy will be able to help us sell what we don't want."

"I shall let the vicar take his choice, after I have had mine," I said. I relish this daily after-dinner chat with Jones, she is so eminently practical. She supplies me, all unknowingly, with many ideas. "That will be partly my gift towards the Play House."

"I should n't do anything without telling Mrs. Duveen," Jones admonishes me. "She would n't like it; and she does carry on about things she don't like. That there young man what drives her motor, he told me——"

"You should n't have listened, Jones."

"No, sir. In course not." She moved to the door. "When does Miss Dene come down again, sir? Because I like to do the garding just beforehand."

She receives my statement, "I'm not quite sure when Miss Dene will next be in Carbridge," with obvious disbelief. She knows I know—to a minute. Jones is putting two and two together, I can tell; and the secret won't be much of a secret to her, when it comes to be declared. That's one disadvantage of old servants; they become so much part of one's life that they necessarily know all about everything. I'm sure Jones regards my antiques and curios and books as being hers also, in a very large measure. The

only possession we do not fairly share is Keedels, the cat. He is chiefly Jones's—and (between ourselves) I don't much mind.

I light my pipe, and smoke—and dream: the dream that's a secret, of course. I wonder if I shall wake up presently and discover——

You see, I feel that I don't deserve it. What have I done to be so opulently rewarded? I look backward to perceive myself self-centred, morbid, a man of small horizon, a fellow who will never be anybody much—not even rich, not even a great collector. I shall always be round-shouldered, and go about my little business in a little way. Round shoulders, however, do not “show up” old comfortable clothes. I can't help it—I worship my old clothes. As I said just now of Jones, they're so much part of myself. When I'm in a new suit I feel another person entirely; an unpleasant, conscious creature who thinks every one is quizzing him. I should n't mind writing a chapter about clothes, only Carlyle has done it before me. Still, if we're not to do things just because somebody has done them before us, we may as well give up being alive. And *that* is our sole justification: the only reason why we should be tolerated at all.

Looking back, I find nothing achieved. I have never wilfully injured any one, perhaps;

and have attempted to do as I would be done by——

But there is no credit in this. It would hurt me to do otherwise. It would make me ashamed of myself; and I must suppose I am not extraordinarily sensitive. No one wilfully hurts another. Occasionally one of us may be a trifle forgetful; may not be quite so alert as usual. Then, unconsciously, injury is done.

I continue to sum myself up, seeking diligently for my virtues—and my works. There are a few books above my name—the titles of them, I mean. The books (save those copies naturally on my own shelves) have been “pulped” long ago. Throughout I have been consistently selfish as regards Honesty's garden. I did *not* intend it for Baillie—although I might have brought myself to the ordinary decency of giving it to him, had Honesty loved the lad.

It was because I suspected that she did n't; and because I meanly desired her (in that backstairs way I have detected in myself once or twice), that I bought the garden. Duplicity; worse. My dear Swift (I must call you dear, since surely no one else will be so indulgent!) you are a fraud! A deceiver, an arch self-deceiver.

Sacrifice? You don't know even the rudiments of sacrifice. Billy could teach you. You

have never had to screw and scrape to make both ends outwardly meet. It's tragedy—when poverty must be respectable. One hears of it sometimes; not often. The true martyrs are those who do not complain.

On your knees, then, my dear Swift. The most beautiful story in the world has chosen you for its "hero." And being a hero—mind you don't let folk find you out!

Jones taps: the last post has arrived. I didn't even hear the man knock. "You been asleep, sir," says Jones denouncingly. "Your pipe's on the floor. Might have burnt a 'ole in the rug. Might have burnt the 'ouse down."

A letter from Honesty. So soon as I am alone again I read it; and I—awake.

It was only a dream. Foolish of me to have imagined it could ever be reality. Poor child, poor child!

"Forgive me—if you can. It was wicked of me. You are so good, so considerate; I ought not to count so much on that. You want everybody to be happy—that is why I cannot forgive myself. I have had a bad time of it lately with my thoughts; please do not think too hardly of me. I know you will understand——"

Enclosed is my signet ring; wrapped about with tissue paper to make it less obvious. I gave it to her—last Sunday?

Is it so long ago? Not yet a week?

.

Troubles never come singly, they say. This post has brought me, bad, bad news. I can face the rest though. What are wounds to vanity but vanity?

The *Colosseum* has no further use for my services as sub-editor. Carruthers writes me a very decent letter, covering the directors' formal regrets. He tries to soften the blow. I will not omit to thank Carruthers. He is not to blame.

I must answer Honesty. Somehow I don't seem to care much about the *Colosseum*.

The nights are growing chilly. One soon gets tired, and cold, in October. Jones should start the fires. I must speak to her.

In Paradise Street, last Sunday, we sat before a fire. In the afternoon, too. In the heart of that fire I fancied that I read my fortune, reading my own heart all the while. A fire that burned so brightly could not, of course, burn for long. It—died down, unnoticed either by Honesty or myself.

It lasted long enough, shall I say? No, for that were a bitter thought and unworthy. Lord, keep my memory green—that I may, at the least, be grateful. . . . Honesty must never guess my pain—pity is not akin to the love I wish her

to know. Like the poor folk, I too must make both ends meet outwardly—must seem the same, must hide, even from myself, all that I feel. After all, I shall not be much more alone than before.

False, false! I have not been alone—until to-night. Until to-night I have always had my dreams.

CHAPTER XXXII

I HAVE drawn up a deed of gift by which the Home will be restored to its rightful owner. The Haven will go to those others—poor wee mites, it will be a quiet happiness to me to know that, at last, I have been of some use. I shall take my books and my treasures to a small flat in London; and shall then work hard——

Not to forget. I do not want to forget. All the best of one dies when one forgets.

In my mind I have planned this: that the Haven shall become the Play House for Little Cripples, even as that good fellow the vicar of Carbridge desires. I shall arrange terms not too onerous, and shall give what I can—only stipulating that, since the Play House will need a matron, I shall be allowed to make the first nomination.

So, if Honesty will go back to her garden she will find employment at her gate.

I should like Billy to help Honesty keep house, until the Only Prince shall appear.

But I cannot part with Jones. I have tried

hard to make myself add Jones to the Home in conjunction with Billy. It cannot be done. She must come to London with me, and housekeep yet. I will even welcome Keedels.

Because, whilst I have Jones, I have some excuse for still keeping in touch with Carbridge. She has her interests there, and will want to call at the Home sometimes.

Ah, how we hug our hopes! In that respect we are very frail. I own it. I hope—against hope. It seemed to me that there was something more than gratitude that day when Honesty came to me.

Her letter I have answered. How, I cannot remember.

Also, Carruthers had to be faced; for the new editor and sub-editor take their posts at once on the *Colosseum*. They are keen, shrewd men—so far I can judge, and one hails from New York City. His methods (to me) appear paralytically upheaving. However, we shall see what we shall see.

The directors were extremely polite; trust that I would still continue a contributor—and granted me six months' salary in lieu of notice. They further offered to buy, at a trifle over present value, such of my shares in the *Colosseum, Ltd.*, as I might care to sell.

This offer remains open for a month, and I

shall consider it carefully. The New York City gentleman rather inspires me to accept. I am not fond of earthquakes, and have an inward conviction that the directors are making a big mistake.

They're getting rid of me, for instance.

They have all been very worrying—these business bothers. But they have served to distract my thoughts.

.

A characteristic note from Gatherway this morning. Can't you imagine friend Gatherway writing this:

"DEAR SWIFT: I hear you're making a change, and so likely to be able to consider a notion of mine. Why should n't I have a London branch of my business? Affairs are certainly flourishing, and we may as well take 'em at the flood. I should n't pay you ten thousand a year for taking down the London shutters, and sorting the mail bag; but if you can conceive some other arrangement to our mutual advantage, please let me hear. By the way I wish you to act as best man for me—presently. You're not married, are you?

"Yours, etc.,

"GATHERWAY, *Edinburgh.*"

He signs just as though he were a peer, or a bishop. No initial, and "Edinburgh" scribbled after his name just as if it belonged to him. But it's a heartening letter, coming at this juncture.

Almost following it, behold the motor-car and the Aunt Sophie squadron! I rushed hatless and astonished, into the garden and my aunt's outstretched arms. "Thank goodness, Mortimer, we're not too late!"

"What for?" I wondered, audibly.

"Your Uncle Duveen could n't sleep all night for thinking of you. My dear boy, it's scandalous and disgraceful—and what I expected! We only heard the news yesterday: of course, you'll bring an action against them?"

"I will—when you tell me who they are and what they've done."

Eva put in her word, "I think it so brave of you, Cousin Mortimer; so awfully brave. We are so indignant. Kit said that Mr. Gatherway was in a frightful rage about it. He's coming up to London this very week."

"To see me?" I asked, beginning to fit the puzzle together. What an impulsive ass——

It was rude of me to think of Gatherway like that. He means it for the best; but I can't allow him to sweep up the *Colosseum*. I have n't

settled what to do with those shares of mine yet. If I sell them, Gatherway can do his worst. I shall rather enjoy the spectacle; especially if Edinburgh proves obnoxious to New York City——

That's uncharitable, and revengeful. But Aunt Sophie having despatched the weedy youth to my kitchen, leads me back indoors to my half-finished breakfast. Eva remains in the garden, ostensibly to watch the motor. My mirror shows me, later on, that Baillie has paused at the gate.

My worthy aunt desires to know All About It. I hasten to explain that the directors have deemed it expedient to experiment with the *Colosseum* on American-Irish lines; that they are quite within their rights, legally and morally, in doing so. As long as they enjoy the confidence of the shareholders.

"But do they, Mortimer? Aren't you a shareholder? Can't you turn them all out?"

"With the assistance and concurrence of the hundred-odd other shareholders, no doubt I could turn them all out," I assure her.

"Then why not do it? I would fling them all into the middle of the road——"

"What's the matter with the gutter?" asks Eva, suddenly appearing in the doorway. She is slightly flushed, but still most refreshingly

slangy. "Would n't the gutter be handier—and less of a fag?"

Behind her we observe Baillie. He smiles deprecatingly. "I thocht I would gie ye a peep, Swift," he announces. "But, mayhap, ye will not be for London this day?"

"I shan't go up until the ten-thirty," I inform him.

Aunt Sophie paralyses the unfortunate Jock. "Good-morning, Mr. Baillie; this is a delightful surprise! I imagined you would be in town long before we could get down to Carbridge. My husband still has to breakfast at eight—every morning of his life. But, of course, he is n't a millionaire."

"Father never starts till after nine," remarks the irrepressible Eva, "and even then we don't know that he goes straight to the office. However, if Cousin Mortimer does n't propose earning his daily bread until the ten-thirty, possibly he would like to escort you, mother mine? You must have a lot to talk over; and I should only be more in the way than usual."

"I will look after you, aunt, with pleasure," I say, forthwith.

"Love to all, then," Eva interrupts me, immediately preparing to leave us. She glances at Baillie as she speaks. Her observation evidently includes him, although not in a valedic-

tory sense. "Could I drop you anywhere? At the station, I mean? Mother evidently desires me to rip the motor home—all by my own little self."

"I don't think—" begins Aunt Sophie. But Eva and Jock have already departed. We hear the motor toot-tooting loudly for the gardener's son, who rushes down the garden with his mouth pretty obviously full of breakfast. The trio embark, furiously heralding the fact—then whirl away in a highly aromatic cloud of dust.

"You must tell me everything, Mortimer," says my aunt, returning to her seat. "First of all, give me a cup of tea—if it is n't quite cold; then light your pipe, sit down, and begin absolutely at the beginning."

"There is little to tell—beyond the bare fact of my retirement from the *Colosseum*. That will take place almost directly. Gatherway offers me another billet—but you don't believe in Gatherway, do you?"

"I invariably believe in success, Mortimer. That proves a man, to my mind. Proves him, and improves him."

I make a gesture of dissent. My aunt is emphatic. "Success is the hall-mark which shows that you are dealing with sterling metal. In these days, my dear Mortimer, any one—literally any one—can be clever. There's nothing in it.

Free education is provided, free breakfast—really, this tea of yours is shockingly inferior—raw material is fashioned into brains at no cost at all to the individual. With a result that the average person of to-day is considerably above the standard of our grandfather's generation. My maid can play the piano, and write a *menu*. My gardener can hoe a row of potatoes, or take off a *Michelin* tire without swearing. My cook is simply a mass of palpitating intelligence. I am positively afraid of her."

Aunt Sophie pauses, collects herself. She continues, "Yes, Mortimer, education is the curse of the age. All the young men have migrated to the towns; all of them have become too superior to be anything lower than a clerk; the country is neglected and starving—very much like your poor aunt. I'll have just the wee-est slice of that ham, it looks very good."

"Jones shall make you some fresh tea," I say, and ring the bell.

When we are alone again the lecture is resumed. "There's Jones, now. I expect she will be leaving you one of these fine days. There are no servants in England, Mortimer. They're all of them young ladies. Lady-companions, lady-helps, typists, waitresses: anything to get their evenings free, and be misses——"

"And Mrs.," I suggest.

"If they can. And they're clever enough even for that. A woman who can catch a man in these hard times deserves her friend's congratulations. That's success, Mortimer. Which brings me back to Mr. Gatherway. I originally misunderstood him. There you are. I admit it. Now, I understand—and appreciate him. While you have been dreaming he has secured the prize."

"Do you think I could have won it? Her, I mean?"

"Did you try?" retorts my aunt. "Mortimer, you're incorrigible! Why will you persist in dreaming? *When* will you awake?"

"When all the busy people are asleep, I expect. So look out!" I shook my finger at her. "My dear aunt, allow me to ask you a riddle—in return for the conundrum with which you have just posed me. What is happiness?"

"To love, and be beloved."

"Exactly." I rose, came to her side, and kissed her gently on the forehead. "That's the kind of success I want," I told her.

Aunt Sophie was quiet—for almost two seconds. Then: "That's very pretty, even if it's not very practical," she decided. "I suppose it is also a hint that I'm not to ask any more questions. Mortimer, I desire you to know it is your uncle's wish—and my own—that, in the

event of your being in any difficulty"—she hesitated. "My dear, dear boy, you will bring your troubles to us, won't you? We regard you as a son; and, indeed, we are very anxious."

"Thank you, dear," I said, kissing her again. "You are answering my riddle in full."

.

I was n't sorry to get back home again to-night. Everything is virtually cleared up at the *Colosseum*. I have said "good-bye" to Carr: A kind-hearted, sympathetic lad, that.

My dinner seemed unusually lonely. Somehow or other, I did n't feel very cheerful. I know things are for the best; that they happen that way. Does life teach anything else, I wonder? It seems to me that one has to wait a long time—to gain very little.

Jones appeared depressed; but it's the fall of the year. The Undertaker had called during my absence; and he generally contrives to environ gloom. The plans for the Play House progress, however. Presently, I shall have to see about the appointment of matron. The promoters of the scheme will agree to leave me that duty.

In clearing away the dinner Jones raised a small discussion—in her usual style. "We had visitors early to-day," she remarked. "They ketched me in my cottons."

"Mrs. Duveen was very severe on our tea," I said, preparing to fill my pipe. "By the way, Jones, where do we get our tea?"

"Hoy's done the last lot, sir. I generally goes to the Colonial for it. But they're so independent like, they won't leave it without the money. I was that vexed the other day—I had n't got no change, and the boy he would n't leave nothing. So I told him straight that we'd go somewhere else. Aggravating impudence."

"It's their system, I believe. It was n't the boy's fault."

"They ought to know where their money's all right, and where it is n't," argued Jones. "They've served us for ever so long. I don't care for Hoy, either. He thinks too much of hisself."

"I don't much care for his tea," I confessed.

"So dear, too. He knows how to charge, that there Hoy. I told his young man what I thought of him." Jones remained, hovering. "Did you know it was raining, sir?"

I expressed surprise.

"Ever so hard," continued Jones, more cheerfully, "Keedels had to stay in. He don't like that."

She fidgeted with her apron. "Mrs. Duveen was rather in a way, was n't she, sir?"

"She was n't in my way," I joked, feebly.

Jones did not respond suitably. Instead, she went on in a more than ever Jonesian manner: "I hope you will excuse the liberty, sir, but I been thinking Mrs. Duveen brought you bad news, sir. I'm sure I trust you'll forgive the liberty."

"Mrs. Duveen did n't bring me any bad news, Jones——"

"Then it was here before she come," interposed my faithful old friend. "I know it's no business of mine—and yet it is, in a sort of fashion. It's been in the air like, all day long; and all the last week. I knowed it direckly I heard you was going to leave the Haven." She turned her back upon me, and resolutely fell to dusting the Adam sideboard with her apron. "In course, it is a liberty, put it how you will, and I'm sure I humbly begs your pardon, sir. But I wanted to say that it won't make no difference to me, if you'll only let me stay on. A good home and a kind home is worth everythink."

"My dear girl—" I began, dumbfounded. She turned round at once; and, for a moment, her eyes challenged mine. "I ain't going to go, so there!" she cried, literally. "I won't go. And if you've lost all your money, I'll work for n-n-nothing! It would fair break my heart." Her apron went up to her eyes, and she burst

into a storm of weeping. "There's that—there cat—too. He's all I got—to love—in the world. He's all I got. I could n't—leave him."

"You shan't," I said, firmly. "I have n't lost quite all my money. I'm certain there will be enough; for myself, for you—and a little over for Keedels. Now, don't be a silly girl. It's ridiculous of you to go on like this. I can't imagine what can have put such nonsensical ideas into your head. Listen; some one's at the door. Run along into the kitchen, I'll go myself. I'm sure I'm much obliged to you, Jones: the place would n't be home without you—and Keedels. We must n't forget Keedles!"

CHAPTER XXXIII

BLANK astonishment, giving way to alarm, when at length I opened the front door. I beheld, forlorn and dripping, the small but valiant Billy.

As I exclaimed, she hopped on to the doormat. She shook herself like a soused bird, and hopped again. "I had to come myself because there was n't any other way," she remarked breathlessly. "I nearly got lost I did. Oo—don't it rain."

She leaned against the open hall-door, stork-like, still on one leg. "You don't seem very glad to see me."

I put out my hand, with some welcome on my lips. I was stricken dumb with concern for this naughty imp, and my mind was working in every direction to guess what had prompted this utterly unlooked-for visit. Next instant present things sent surmise to the winds. My little stork had ventured to put both legs to the ground.

I managed to catch her; she fell with agonised whimperings into my arms, continued until I had carried her, helter-skelter, to my den. As I laid her on the couch she gave a tiny gasp, as if of relief; then became ominously quiet. Jones came rushing to the rescue, in answer to my frantic call.

"It's her foot, I expect. Quick! off with her boots. I expect her ankle has got twisted. No, I'll do it. Run for the doctor. Quick as you can."

Jones, all alert now, and quite her useful self again, left me with Billy. I whipped off the child's boots (those dreadful old ones again, I noticed), and made some attempt to bring her round. She had fainted in dead earnest.

I managed to force a little brandy between her cold lips, and pillowed her into some seeming of comfort. Then sharp application of cold water upon her forehead suddenly restored animation. She gasped once, twice, and decided to go on with the business of life.

Her feet were icy, but I knew a natural magic for making them warm. I drew away her stockings from under her convulsive little toes, then chafed each frozen foot cleverly between my hands as I knelt beside her. "Oo—that's nice," she sighed.

"Any pain, Billy?"

"Not now. It was when I put my foot down. I could n't keep hopping—" She closed her eyes. "I do feel so sleepy, I do."

"Go to sleep then. I'll watch over you. Are you *sure* you have n't hurt yourself?"

"My leg's bad when I move. I'll be all right in a minute I will. Where's that girl of yours? She has n't gone for no doctors?"

"Of course not! Let me get this wet hat off your head. There, that's better. What beautiful hair you have, Billy."

"I don't always keep it in a pig-tail, you know. I'm getting too old." She wriggled into a sitting posture. "I had to come myself you know because she was crying so. It fair gave me the horrors to hear her last night."

"Honesty?"

"Miss D. It woke me up. It was in the middle of the night when everything was dark. I was n't frightened of that landing. I just creeped out and into her bed. She thought I was a ghost she did."

"Why was she crying? Did she tell you?"
(My heart was thumping strangely, strangely.)

"I did n't want her to tell me. It was all my fault. I knew why she was crying. Don't you?"

"I can guess, perhaps."

"No, you can't. You don't never guess right.

She was crying because I told her a lot of lies. Orful lies."

"Why did you tell her lies, Billy?"

"Why do I ever do mean wicked things? Because I'm a beast that's why. A nasty ugly little beast."

I made her lie down again. "Never mind. I don't think you a beast; and you are certainly not ugly. Not with that beautiful hair."

"It's all very well to talk," she snapped. "That's the worst of you. You say so many nice things that folk believes you. I don't believe you. There!"

"I'm prepared to admit you're little, my dear. It was only the ugly and the other things that I questioned. Will that pacify you?"

"Wait till you hear the lies I told. Oo—I did let myself go! Because I see how it was going to be. From the first I see it. So I did my best, and I did my worst. I said you did n't really care a bit. Not in the right style, I said. Only because you were kind-hearted, and could see she had fallen in love with you——"

"Billy!"

"Yes I did. And worse! And worse! I said you bought her house to sell it to Mr. Baillie; him what you always kept trying to shove in her way. I said no man what really truly loved a girl would even pretend to want another man

to have her. So it was plain you did n't love her at all." Billy writhed in my arms and would not keep still. "Now are n't I a beast?"

"She did n't believe it," I said, softly. "She would n't misunderstand me like that."

"Perhaps she did n't believe it, right down deep, but on the top she had to. Girls don't like a man to be gentle and—molly-coddling like you are sometimes. They like adventures and fighting."

"That's because you like adventures." My heart was quieter. I knew now. I was blind no longer.

"And then when it was n't any use that Baillie—Oo—I hate him worse than I hate you."

"You don't hate me, Billy."

"I do, I do! You're going to take her from me you are. After all I done."

"I won't part you, my dear. It would be sorry work parting true friends."

"That's what you say now." She fixed me with another, fiercer question. "Did n't you ask her just because Mr. Baillie would n't?"

"You told Honesty *that*?"

"Now you're angry you are. Why don't you hit me? I want you to hit me. That's why I came down all through the rain. I got to be what-d'you-call-'em, and clap my hands and make it all come right, now that I nearly made

it all come wrong. She cried so she did. She did n't want to believe what I said."

"And she did n't believe, Billy. Not right down deep."

"She wrote that letter! That was to see what you'd do. I know. She won't own it; but us girls are all alike. We want telling and telling over and over again; and yet it don't seem true. Because it's too wonderful to be true. Do you feel like that?"

I looked steadfastly into those bright, eager eyes, unclouded for the instant by any thought of self. "I love her with all my heart and all my soul, Billy. I dare not even let God know how much I love her. I would sacrifice everything that she might be happy. How can I be so vain as to think that my happiness will be hers as well?"

"You ought to know it would," said she miserably. "You ought n't to want no one to tell you."

In my heart was that peace which passeth all understanding. I think that the child knew it, and the fires of her jealousy flamed upward again. "You don't deserve her you don't. I wonder what she can see in you. You're old you are."

I suppose I smiled at this. Her face grew pinched, and her expression was not pretty.

Then she softened again, and put out her arms to me. "I—hate you," she whimpered. "From the first I told you I did."

"Never mind all that," I murmured soothingly. "Forget it, Billy. We're friends again, all of us. That's the great thing."

"I have n't told you all. There was a letter. You will hate me now."

"You have brought me such good news, Billy, that I can forgive anything."

"You wait. There was a letter addressed to Mr. Mortimer S——"

"I know. It got burnt."

"Yes it got burnt." She closed her eyes resolutely, and remained unresponsive in my arms. "I—burnt it."

"You?"

"Because I hated you even then. She used to talk about you. So I burnt the old letter after she wrote it. I did it quite secret."

"And Honesty thought I had had it?"

"I suppose so. I wanted her to think you did n't care. So I said I'd post it; and she give it me. And I kept it till she was gone. Then I just chucked it in the fire."

"Does Honesty still think I had her letter, Billy?"

"Now you're wild! I don't care. Yes, she does."

"You must tell her——"

"I shan't. I won't! If you tell her I'll kill you."

"It's only fair, Billy. You must tell her."

She opened her eyes and glared defiantly into mine. Her glance wavered, tears trembled in it. "You tell her, Mortimer," she whispered, chokingly. "And Mortimer, dear—don't let her hate me. Because I love her too. I do love her, so much, so much."

.

Can you see me hurrying through the rain, and not knowing that it rained at all? Would you not have wished for the wings of Icarus; and would you not have flown instantly towards the sun also?

Ah, well-named little mean street! Paradise was waiting for me there, behind those stunted, sturdy, leafless poplars. I cannot tell you all that I said, all that happened. Only I know that at last I said the right thing; that heart spoke to heart; that there was no shadow between us. So long as we live no shadow shall come between us.

There are some matters quite sacred. They must stay for ever in that holy of all holies, for each of us alone to know. Such a wonderful secret as mine comes but once in a life; but, having come, remains until the end. It is this

that is the better part of us; the part which is divine.

As magic, the rain had ceased. The night was calm; there were stars. We found Billy sleeping happily in the arms of my patient and faithful Jones. Upon the hearthrug was Keedels, purring before the clear heat of an unusual fire. Whilst the mother knelt by her child, Honesty and I stood apart.

Billy stirred, awoke. She hugged her mother close, then espied us. Honesty came to her; but Billy slipped out of the loving arms which sought to pinion her, and showed that she was unhurt by reaching Honesty in two amazing hops, and one little skip.

"The doctor he says there is n't nothing the matter and my leg is n't broke again so there. You ask him." Billy's sweeping gestures implicated me. "He would n't go to fetch you until the old doctor had been he is a worry that Mortimer. I just got to stay here for a week—and so has *she*." Honesty was not permitted even to expostulate at this. "He can go back home with mother presently and tell father I'm all right."

No one venturing to offer an amendment caused Billy to suggest one herself: "Perhaps I had n't better stay quite a week in case father wants me. But she must stay because it'll do

her good. Mortimer wants you to help him move," she explained, as an after-thought; and I guessed Jones had been talking.

It seemed a good plan that Billy should stay at the Haven. Indeed, we did not quite see how we could safely convey her home. She was formally consigned to Jones, therefore, so soon as she had again fallen asleep; and Honesty and I went back to Paradise (need I write street? It was Paradise to me in brief!) to bear the latest news to Mr. Jolliman. Mrs. Jolliman had a natural desire to stay with Billy, if this could be arranged, for the night at least; and we were her ambassadors to her lawful (and awful) lord.

It was one of his early departure weeks; and, in any case, he would have to leave Clapham at three in the morning. It was the ten o'clock up-train which we contrived to catch; so that there was not much in it, one way or the other.

We managed to secure a compartment in the train to ourselves. At least, I managed it. Credit should be given where credit is due. I ventured to produce, from between the leaves of my pocket-book, a much-pressed, queer little one-time flower—a columbine. "That's for remembrance," I told Honesty.

Her fingers had been in mine, but now she drew them away—to find her purse. She opened it. "I must pay you—in kind," she whispered,

softly. "That is the only way I can ever repay you."

There was an inner compartment to the purse, with another fastening. A place to store gold—and other precious matters. If one has no gold, one may still have treasures. Don't you admit that?

Honesty had no greater treasure than a withered sprig of white heather—at least, so she said. I was very fain to believe her. "That's for luck," she averred. "The best possible good luck in the world."

Other memories came before us at sight of that faded white heather. Have I not said that most beautiful things are sad? Sorrow is with us always; and this is only right. We touch the keys of joy, but the black notes are there, too; and without them how can we expect to evoke the more exquisite melodies?

CHAPTER XXXIV

HAVE you ever moved? If you have you will readily believe with me that a life *can* be lived in a single day! I positively had not the slightest notion that moving was such a business. Although it must be six—seven months ago, the memory of that great upheaval is still a pang.

The Undertaker deceived me altogether. He declared, solemnly I do assure you, that Messrs. Wright and Co. could recommend a firm who would move us “in a jiffy.” The Undertaker vowed that I should n’t even suspect I was moving. He covenanted that we should be translated from the Haven to the Home practically before we could turn round. The charge, he was encouraged to imagine, would be almost nominal——

When I say from the Haven to the Home, I am not strictly in order, because the Haven has moved with us. In fact, it went first.

A certain young lady, having some leisure from her duties as typist in general to a certain gifted author, painted out (with the assistance

of the Undertaker aforesaid) the inscription on one gate, and I screwed it in (in brass letters) on the other.

We went to Devon, of course. To Lynmouth, equally of course. Did n't I say I could n't go anywhere else for a honeymoon? Especially in springtime, when trout fishing has just begun!

It was a lover and his lass—a lover not half good enough, if you will—who hand in hand climbed the path to Watersmeet, and onward to Brendon; who gathered those first sweet violets and golden primroses, while timid ferns were stretching fragile fronds upward—to find out if the sun were really awake at last. A lover no longer old, if you please; whose round shoulders were making desperate and not altogether unsuccessful efforts to square themselves—because the lover was so very proud of his lass; so conceited and vain of his wonderful good fortune.

The trees were tenderly green. Even the oaks had ventured to peep forth at the happiness of those two curious beings who walked so quietly beneath them. When hearts are full they speak without words.

I was Gatherway's best man; Jock was mine. He and Eva have to wait a while. Uncle Duveen has decreed it, and not all the king's horses—nor *our* Aunt Sophie's—can displace

Uncle Duveen, once he puts his foot down. It's so large—and so gouty, that's why—says Eva.

The late Haven has developed into the play house for those poor little ones. Honesty could not be matron, after all. There was no urgent reason why she should neglect the new Haven—formerly the Home—and myself. I found I could n't spare Honesty—not even for a minute.

Billy, once again sound of wind and limb, is Play Mistress in Chief at the Play House, and seems likely to become as invaluable to the establishment as Jones must always be to the Haven, new or old. I did n't care for the idea of sharing Jones; but, you see, it had to be done. Diplomatically, it need scarcely be said. Jones has to be handled cautiously. If she had n't approved of Honesty, Honesty could n't have become her mistress. There was the position, in a nutshell.

Can you picture Honesty and me without Jones? And Keedels? The imagination (my own, at all events) reels at the bare thought. Jones knows all my ways, my hours, my wants, my likes—and my dislikes. She understands my crotchets, and my little periodical bad tempers. She knows how to dust my books; and can do it without tidily putting back those I have taken from the shelves for easy reference.

You have been instructed before of this great

cardinal virtue in Jones; but you may not have grasped the full beauty of it. Like the wise thrush, I sing my story of Jones's astounding abilities twice over, lest you should miss the first fine careless rapture!

It is necessary that I should insist on Jones's virtues, although at risk of boring you. I have re-opened this *magnum opus* chiefly on account of Jones. She is an old servant. What might seem freedom of speech, and—well, presumption—in another Jones must be allowed for. Allowances are always worth while.

As I told my wife——

I must have a look at that sentence. It has n't occurred before on any one of these many pages. I like it. It has a masterful ring about it. There's a true sense of property in the expression. And property is real estate. Ask my venerable friend the Undertaker.

As I told my wife only a few moments ago——

You will pardon me, won't you? How did you feel on the initial occasion you committed that phrase to cold black and white? Did n't it appear to you that *now* you were a person of huge international importance? It did. Very well; forgive my vanity.

As I told Honesty a few moments ago, it is far better to let Jones give Keedels an over-supply of the daily milk, and rather more of the

herring than legitimately belongs to the "head," than have an awkward, china-breaking, kitchen-sweethearting young miss interloping at the Haven. Jones might get dressed earlier in the afternoon, of course; and her taste (or rather the taste of her friends) in pictorial postcards could easily be on a higher plane. But pray observe the way Jones gets up in the morning; remember how punctual are our meals; how nicely cooked——

"That is all you men think about," says a voice from behind my desk-chair, and consequently behind me. "I can tell you, Mortimer, that that cat drinks——"

"Which cat, my love?"

"If Jones heard you say that! However, if you had to settle the weekly milk bill, you would soon guess which cat! Go on with your writing; I did n't mean to interrupt you, only there seemed so much about Jones——"

"I'm saving you for the last. You're first—and last—with me."

"I must be in between as well. I know this is n't *my* hour; and that's exactly why I want it. I notice that you commence this chapter by asking your quite hypothetical readers whether they have ever moved. You have given them no chance of an answer, nor any explanation as to why you propounded the question."

I wheeled round here to regard Honesty seriously. "They say people become alike when they're married," I pronounced, magisterially. "But I can't have you turning literary so soon. There are too many women writers as it is. Ask any man. A woman's place——"

"Yes, dear, I know. Mending the socks and making the puddings. Also her own dresses (poor thing!), but Jones won't let me make the puddings; and that's where it all begins. Why can't I be allowed to make puddings, Mortimer?"

"Let every one do the thing he (or she) does best. You look very pretty to-night."

"In this old frock!" Honesty appeared amusedly unconvinced, although she must know she is pretty. Very, very pretty. "*That* implies I'm hideous on other nights. Yes, it does. You can't get out of it, so continue your writing—at once. I only came into your den to ask how you got on in town to-day; and whether you wish to have this utterly inappropriate legend hung up again over the door? I found it in one of the boxes of rubbish which had n't been turned out since the moving."

She exhibited the small narrow board which formerly was fixed above the lintel of my old den: "Pleased to see the world go by in all its changing imagery."

"You're not a bit like that now," Honesty declared. "You're—changed."

"For the better?"

"Ever so much for the better. You're so much more—strong, and confident. You're almost fierce at times."

"My responsibilities make me fierce. I have to bear the burden of Atlas. What with Gatherway and his schemes——"

"They're successful."

"Entirely owing to me—Gatherway and his schemes; the Play House; Jones and her cat; Eva and young Baillie; the Alfred book——"

"That's in a second edition."

"Very properly so. The Alfred book; the *Little Marvels*; the fact that I have lost all my valued possessions since we moved——"

"Lost *all*?"

"Give me a kiss, and don't interrupt. I—I—you make me fear I'm too happy, sometimes—because life levels up so. There, that's a thought in the minor key. We oughtn't to doubt. When you are near me I don't doubt. You are the exception to prove the rule. But it certainly *is* a funny thing I can't find that copy of Herrick's *Hesperides*——"

"You had it in your pocket when we were at Lynmouth. Don't you recollect reading it to me that day we walked through Glenthorne?"

We sat by one of the old gates, and you found 'Love like a gipsy lately came and did me much importune——' "

" 'To see my hand—that by the same He might foretell my fortune.' You're quite right! I did have Herrick then. He's in the pocket of my old Norfolk jacket. 'He saw my palm; and then said he'—How does it go? "

Honesty whispered the rest. " 'I tell thee, by this scar here, That thou within few months shalt be The Youthful Prince d'Amour here.' " She had my hand; and she caught it to her heart.

.

But I was going to tell you how we moved. You can expect us to have done the garden moving, in October and November last year. Honesty's garden will be as beautiful as ever this summer. Come to Carbridge, and see for yourself.

It was a showery day, and the wind was really rather annoying. It had a way of whisking papers out of one's hands—and I have a lot of papers. These and my books had to be moved by myself. I allowed them to help with the heavy books. The Undertaker and Billy were most useful.

My new den is jolly. Absolutely jolly. The bookshelves are arranged all round three sides of the room and stand about five feet high, ex-

cept by the fireplace, where they reach to the frieze. All along the shelf which makes the top, I have grouped my old brass candlesticks and pots and pans; and an ancient lantern clock (Cromwellian—I bought it last Christmas for a joint preliminary wedding present to Honesty and myself) ticks joyfully amid its bravely glittering surroundings. I have a nice garnish of pewter too, by itself, on the mantelpiece. Also a comfortable window-seat; and my small mirror—which pictures still the comedy of love.

The “Adam” sideboard is in the parlour, and carries the best china. Honesty has unearthed some very nice pieces. Old Stafford, Shenton, Coalbrookdale. They have all been duly identified in Chaffers’s. The drawing-room——

Well, we don’t call it a drawing-room, but simply the best room. It sounds more country-fied and—homely. It’s in a French scheme, *Rose du Barri* colouring throughout—walls, drapery, carpet.

Louis XVIth gilt furniture. (Models, of course. I’m only a poor man!) A short rosewood grand piano; a rosewood cabinet—for my one or two pieces of Dresden, and the Lowestoft mugs, and the square-mark Worcester, and the Nantgarw tea-service. Another window-seat. A decorated Spanish mahogany round table——

(This does n’t hurt the rosewood.)

You note, with my new-found arrogance, that the personal pronoun predominates? My brass candlesticks; my Dresden! *Our* Dresden, of course. It's our everything.

The best room is really Honesty's. She designed it all. People say, directly they enter it, "What a sweet room!" They can't help themselves; the truth will out!

We own two grandfather clocks, and can thus lay claim to be considered in Carbridge. A warming pan lends distinction to the hall; and warming-pans are the sign-royal in Carbridge. No self-respecting cottage is without one.

Bless me, how happy I am! Foolishly happy, do you dare to suggest? I know I have more than my deserts—but, who has n't?

Be sure, I will not forget . . . to walk humbly in Honesty's Garden.

THE END

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